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The “Other” Teacher: Understanding the Experience of Graduate Teaching Assistants in Neoliberal Teacher Education Settings

Jing Zhang

West Virginia University, jnzhang1@mail.wvu.edu

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The “Other” Teacher: Understanding the Experience of Graduate Teaching Assistants in Neoliberal Teacher Education Settings

Jing Zhang

Dissertation submitted
to the College of Education and Human Services at West Virginia
University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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in

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Melissa Sherfinski, Ph.D., Chair Sharon Hayes, Ph.D.
Keri Valentine, Ph.D.
Jiangmei Yuan, Ph.D.

Department of Curriculum & Instruction

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2020

Keywords: graduate school, teaching assistants, neoliberalism, discourse and power, identity

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ABSTRACT

The “Other” Teacher: Understanding the Experience of Graduate Teaching Assistants in Neoliberal Teacher Education Settings

Jing Zhang

In this study, I critically examine how graduate teaching assistants' (GTAs') experiences are discursively shaped by the exercise of power in neoliberal higher education contexts and hence, to reveal the hidden aspects of educational institutions, which are central to our understandings about the meaning of truth, fairness, and equity embedded in neoliberal academic settings. To understand the experiences of graduate teaching assistants in this neoliberal teacher education setting, the major research questions of this study explore how the different identities that GTAs possess influence their interactions with the neoliberal higher education context and how they navigate as well as resist such power relations.

In order to critically examine how GTAs become marginalized on college campuses, a combined theoretical framework is employed in this study including a Foucauldian analysis of power and discourse (e.g., Michael Foucault), positioning theory (e.g., Rom Harré and Luk Van Langenhove), and intersectionality (e.g., Patricia Hill Collins). Moreover, critical narrative analysis of GTAs' experiences (n=5) will be the study method. Data are primarily collected from semi-structured in person interviews. The data analysis revealed shared common experiences of GTAs working in neoliberal teacher education settings, and unique individual experiences due to the intersecting identities that each of the participants possess.

The results of this study suggest that neoliberal discourses have penetrated every aspect of graduate students' academic lives, which have forced us to talk about and conduct ourselves in ways that are most desired by the neoliberal institutions, or what Foucault (1998) refers to as “the technology of the self.” As a result, our relationships with our professors, colleagues, as well as our students, have changed profoundly. Moreover, the GTAs' experiences in the neoliberal institutions become more complicated when different identities are taken into consideration, which have created a mass site of struggles within each of us. Many of the participants have adopted Foucault's notion of “the care of the self” (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) as a way to approach the complex relationships in the neoliberal working environment and to resist the neoliberal governmentalities. Lastly, structural and policy level changes as well as limitations of this study are also provided at the end of the paper.

Keywords: graduate school, teaching assistants, neoliberalism, discourse and power, identity

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Introduction

Throughout the past four decades, the purpose, the economics and the structure of higher education have changed in order to better align universities with neoliberal practices and ideology (D. Saunders, 2010). According to McChesney (1999), neoliberalism refers to “the policies and processes whereby a relative handful of private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximize their personal profit” (p. 7).

In contemporary societies, the neoliberal market principles have extended beyond the political and economic spheres by inciting individuals and institutions of all walks to conduct themselves in an entrepreneurial fashion (Scharff, 2015). In the field of higher education, at the macro level, higher education institutions have lost their position as the priority in state affairs and have gradually transformed into enterprises, actively looking for industrial partners for research funds (Giroux, 2002). Universities commercialize their programs, curricula, on-campus services, etc., in order to attract more students who will, in turn, contribute to substantive financial gain for the institutions (Apple, 2011; Lynch, 2010; Torres, 2011). On the other hand, the numbers of tenured positions offered have consistently decreased in recent years, leading to a steady increase of non-tenured instructors and graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) tasked with the teaching of large classes as a means to maximize revenue and reduce university costs (Giroux, 2002; Kloet & Aspenlieder, 2013).

Such practices of neoliberal ideology often intensify surveillance and control over the instructors and GTAs who are the “foot soldiers” of the new teacher education regime. I know this because I am a GTA, and have been at two institutions over the past four years. As we are considered to be “low-level sales representatives,” relentless measurements of GTAs’ performances take place in different forms, in order to ensure “qualified service” for their

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consumers. Neoliberalism requires a new type of teacher formed within the logic of competition, which makes us each singularly responsible for our performance according to the established (yet often hidden) evaluative criteria. As GTAs, our educational capital becomes our deficit.

We question our teaching beliefs and cultural values in order to align ourselves with the most desired teacher image held by those in power. In neoliberal education contexts, GTAs rank at the bottom of the higher education institutional hierarchy, and are positioned as the “clowns,” competing for attention in the neoliberal impression management system which dictates people to alter self-presentation or code-switch in order to appeal to those who are more privileged (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Pitcan, Marwick, & Boyd, 2018). When we inevitably fail to compete appropriately, we risk being excluded and marginalized from the dominant discourse, through which institutions’ power and politics are frequently exercised (Mayr, 2008). We become the oppressed ones, the Other teachers.

Oppression occurs in the lives of GTAs with continuously repeated specific harmful discourses that are carried out by dominant groups in order to reproduce their positions of dominance (Mayr, 2008). Theoretically, one can free oneself from oppression and gain agency when detrimental situations are adequately understood and addressed (Creswell, 2007a). However, institutional systematic structural oppressions are often obscured by official ideology claiming to value equality of opportunity, and thus, concealing unequal power distribution within higher education institutions (P. H. Collins, 1993; Duncan, 2014). The underlying mechanism of how neoliberal educational institutions are run is what bars GTAs from attaining their full agency in teaching. In recent years, strikes were held by graduate teaching assistants on American campuses to protect their rights from corporate model of efficiency in neoliberal universities. For instance, back in March 2016, graduate employees at Yale University protested

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against multiple issues faced on campus including gender and racial diversity in hiring and requests for fair pay and health care to address GTAs' health problems as a result of the competitive as well as alienating campus climates (M. Chen, 2016).

Ironically, on-campus services that aim to improve GTAs' experiences, including different types of workshops and counseling centers, go hand in hand with the neoliberal ideology of control. Meanwhile, counseling centers are especially problematic due to the asylum-like function they serve on college campuses. By asylum, I mean mental support spaces provided on campus which make it possible for GTAs to conceive, speak about, judge, and conduct themselves in new ways through the use of therapeutic practices (Rose, 1999). The presence of these services presumes that the "abnormality" structured through neoliberal institutions and the positioning of GTAs within them is caused by an internal, organic deficit within GTAs rather than by the oppressive positioning itself (Larsson & Jormfeldt, 2017). This promotes the internalization of neoliberalism within students, encouraging them to perceive problems as personal rather than situated in large social contexts (Ball, 2003; Duncan, 2014; Vargas, 1999). As a member of this landscape, I have gradually grown frustrated with the circumstances surrounding me.

To put my frustration in context: As an Asian GTA, on many occasions in my work, I feel that my presence has disturbed the norms of my department because of my different cultural repertoire rooted in my intersecting identities as an educator of color, which has prevented me from producing the desired "right" output. I have longed for a specific accent and speech pattern where words are meticulously arranged and pronounced, the pattern that signifies the status of the American upper-middle class that seems to dominate higher education. Teaching in the world of GTAs is about aligning oneself with the most desired image of a teacher.

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As I have embarked on my journey of seeking explanations and making sense of the neoliberal university, I first resorted to the various workshops provided on campus to aid in my sense making. When this approach failed, I tried counseling. As it turns out, I am not alone. My experiences in the on-campus “asylum” have shown me that there are many GTAs, who share similar struggles.

Although GTAs’ stories vary due to the different layers of identity that each of us embodies, our feelings are similar, our status as “the Other teacher” run parallel, and our resistance to becoming subjects of institutional power relations remain continuously desired, yet beyond our reach. As a GTA of color in Teacher Education, I feel compelled to tell our stories. These stories are lived, witnessed and told by my colleagues and I. These stories are so often shunned and denied since certain emotions are thought to have no place in our institutions because neoliberal ideology attempts to structure a corporate model of efficiency, and people can only be valued if they produce measurable outcomes. These may include the completion of specific assigned duties such as grading student work in a timely manner and being consistent throughout. Failure to do so may lead to losing the opportunity of continued funding as a GTA (“Guidelines for duties and evaluation of graduate assistants,” n.d.; Gutiérrez, Yolanda, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012).

This project has three purposes. Its primary purpose is to explore how the intersectionality of complex layers of GTAs’ identity in teacher education (such as race, gender, social class, etc.) hinder or facilitate their interactions with their students and colleagues, as well as the larger institutional contexts. In doing so, this project also aims to reveal the hidden aspects of educational institutions, which are central to our understandings about the meaning of truth, fairness, and equity embedded in neoliberal academic settings. Lastly, the current study aims at

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providing a safe and empowering space where the Other teachers' emotions and stories are valued and critically examined. Rather than fitting in, our marginalized status creates a space for resistance. Emotional expression should be taken as part of truth-telling (Lloro-Bidart & Semenko, 2017). In this space, we find meaning with our lived and told stories. Through this, we question the dominant hegemonic discourse in our institutions. We find the strength to be assertive about what doesn't work so that we can help one another navigate neoliberal power relations (Gonzalez, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2002; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

In this paper, I examine relevant literature to reveal how GTAs' experiences are shaped by the complex webs of power embedded in neoliberal education settings.

Neoliberalism and Higher Education

Neoliberalism refers to the policies and processes whereby a handful of private interests are allowed to control, as much as possible, social life in order to maximize their profit (Giroux, 2002). Saunders (2010) suggests that neoliberalism embraces three broad beliefs: the benevolence of the free market, minimal intervention and regulation of the economy by the government, as well as framing individuals as the rational entrepreneurs (Vander Kloet & Aspenlieder, 2013).

Quite contrary to corporations' calls for deregulation and more autonomy as well as independence from the government, within these market giants a trend of centralization of control is ubiquitous. This allows them to govern efficiently and ensure themselves to make the most gains from the marketplace. Carelessness is at the heart of this type of intensified surveillance. Universities are transformed and run like corporations focused on the training of the labor force for the globalized and competitive market. The neoliberal conception of globalization interconnects people, communities, institutions, and governments in a complex set of marketing practices. This has profoundly affected how workforces are trained, and has failed to enhance education systems to comply with the demands of human rights by raising awareness of the social/cultural values rooted in the core of societies (Santiago, Karimi, & Alicea, 2017; Torres, 2011).

Throughout the history of American education, not only have universities preserved and produced new knowledge, they have also played central roles in diffusing knowledge to the

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public, which leads to the creation of movements for justice as well as opportunities for social mobilization, especially for historically underrepresented communities. Their status as members of marginalized groups usually motivates them to pursue their degrees in higher education (Apple, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2002; Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007; Torres, 2011).

The physical space of key social organizations, such as public universities, not only provides the general public with access to knowledge, but also signifies these essential values such as equity and social responsibility, which people should act upon. Studying at higher institutions is extremely important, especially in the postmodern era. Universities provide a place where students have access to systematic knowledge, and the scope to engage in critical dialogue as well as attend to civic issues (de Sousa Santos, 2010; Giroux, 2002).

However, due to the prevailing neoliberal ideology, over the past years, the roles of universities as well as their pedagogical practices have changed drastically, and we are witnessing a loss of their priority in the state's public policies (de Sousa Santos, 2010; Santiago et al., 2017). Universities are no longer the "social minds" which offer rational criticism on public policies and influence all aspects of social as well as economic life in a society. Instead, they have become "factories" which train a mass workforce for the neoliberal marketplace.

With reduced state funding, more and more universities need to overcome financial crises by generating their own resources, such as increasing tuition (Giroux, 2002). Most importantly, they need to look for and compete for partnerships with industrial capital (de Sousa Santos, 2010; Levin & Aliyeva, 2015; Mountz et al., 2015). As a result, large amounts of corporate capital flow into the universities, which influence universities' research agendas (Giroux, 2002).

Academic disciplines, especially those of the humanities which do not translate into substantial profits, get marginalized, underfunded or even eliminated (Giroux, 2002). Public

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universities are transforming into businesses where inputs and gains are carefully calculated. A close partnership with industrial capital also turns the university into a place where its primary focus is on the training of a highly qualified workforce.

It is clear that the university is becoming a place that endorses research topics and ontological/epistemological foundations which have market value (Giroux, 2002). Consequently, universities are growing out of reach for working-class students due to their elitist framework, a narrowed view about economic relations as well as the spiraling tuition costs (Giroux, 2002; Torres, 2011). Meanwhile, specific programs such as teacher education are marginalized since they provide “low-status” knowledge which is merely usable, and hence they exist at the lower end of the higher education hierarchy (Labaree, 2006).

Within higher education institutions, faculty members often feel pressured to pursue certain practices, which include devoting intensive amounts of time to publishing and procuring grant funding, in order to demonstrate themselves to be responsible and professional so that they are recognizable in the marketplace (Kloet & Aspenlieder, 2013; Levin & Aliyeva, 2015). On the other hand, students’ perceptions about schools and universities are changing as well. These social structures are no longer places for self-actualization. Instead, students see universities like businesses. People who work for them, that is faculty, staff, and GTAs, are taken to be clerks, cashiers or customer-service representatives who are there to sell products to their customers (Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Gutiérrez et al., 2012). Just like all customers in this world, when they find their learning experience to be unpleasant, or they believe that they are not getting a legitimate return on their investment, students tend to unleash their complaints on their professors and GTAs, whom they have direct interactions with (Fitch & Morgan, 2003).

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Therefore, GTAs become the most vulnerable in the higher educational hierarchy. On the one hand, GTAs need to take up the exhausting teaching task and meet the needs of undergraduates in their market-driven institutions (Santiago et al., 2017). On the other hand, as mentees, GTAs also need to navigate being mentored in neoliberalism and the pressures of the neoliberal institutions in general (Manathunga, 2007). As a result, GTAs feel a high level of stress as well as anxiety due to the liminal identities they possess; they are doubly affected by neoliberal power relations as both teachers and students.

Neoliberalism and Teacher Education

Under neoliberal ideology, teachers' work is superficially understood with a simple input and output equation. For instance, teachers are usually held accountable for their students' academic performance. This reductionist view of teaching and learning is problematic since the nurturing of affective relations should be the center of education, especially when working with children of younger ages. An affectionate teacher-student relationship will have long-lasting implications on students' academic and social development (Kaufman, n.d.). Unfortunately under neoliberalism, a richer, more holistic vision of teacher education is disrupted since the affective domain has no place in the context which aims at training technicians who can raise students' scores (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). This refers to teacher educators who must prepare preservice teachers for high stakes knowledge and performance exams such as the Praxis and edTPA. These preservice teachers must eventually be accountable for their young students' scores on standardized tests.

Aside from this, teachers' wellbeing is also at risk since neoliberalism requires new types of teachers who are formed within the logic of competition. It makes us responsible for our performance, and if we do not perform in the expected ways, the impression management system

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will put us in danger of being seen as irresponsible (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). The development of a cohesive, non-hierarchical and mutually supportive relationships among teachers also appears problematic in the context of neoliberal policies since individualism, competition, managerialism, and performativity are emphasized in order to consolidate a culture of compliance within the education profession (Acton & Glasgow, 2015).

As a result, neoliberalism has brought the worst out of us as teachers. Our self-respect and sense of value depend upon external indicators such as our students' evaluations and the recognition we receive from those who are in an immediate power position, such as the professors we work with. At times we vent out frustration on the weak, display childish behavior when we cannot get what we want, delight in the downfall of others, and cherish petty feelings of revenge (Verhaeghe, 2014).

Within neoliberal ideology, diversity in teacher education is not understood as pluralism in society, but rather it is superficially understood as the practices of having people of different colors, races, ages, and social classes work at the same place. Diversity creates challenges for institutional control since racially and ethnically diverse teachers disrupt the current teacher education agenda which centers on dominant cultural ideology (Asmar, Proude, & Inge, 2004; Haddix, 2017; D. Smith & Schonfeld, 2000).

Institutionalized Othering

As the low-ranking soldiers in academia, GTAs are more vulnerable to dominant discourses, which communicate the norms in secret ways. From time to time, GTAs are encouraged to bring their cultural assets and repertoire of experiences into teaching. However, the official discourses and on-campus services (such as workshops and counseling centers) across their institutions implicitly send the message that there is a correct way of doing things in

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elite academic settings (Santiago et al., 2017). In this part of the essay, multiple spaces of higher education institutions will be examined in order to show the “othering” process in academia.

To start with, an institution’s hallways are the places where pictorial statements are displayed which signify who the “normal” professors are. A perfect American paragon is the one who is a “young, married, White, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (Goodman, 1963, as cited in Vargas, 1999, p.364). Every trait listed that Other teachers miss adds a layer to the exclusive feelings they bear. Many may disagree with the above statement about who are the most idealistic Americans in contemporary society and argue that higher education in the U.S. is now post-racial due to the implementation of Affirmative Action (1961) (Stewart, 2012). However, the realities are far more complex. Minorities who are hired through Affirmative Action policies constantly report feeling that they are rewarded because of their race instead of their competencies (Vargas, 1999). Hence, although Affirmative Action aims to increase diversity much needed in higher education, it also adds to the perpetuation of a sense of not belonging among minorities in predominantly White institutions (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Vargas, 1999).

The everyday language used in higher institutions can be daunting for beginning graduate students and GTAs. The label “imposter syndrome” at times is assigned to most beginning GTAs when they reveal feelings of being a fraud as they try to sound intelligent in the elite academy (Hedges, 2018). Meanwhile, little attention is given to the larger institutional contexts which shape their experiences. Language communicates power and such power exists at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, language indicates a speaker’s possession of power, social status or other attractive personal qualities. Revealing them in convincing language, the speaker

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influences the hearer, meanwhile, at the macro level, the power behind language is the collective power of the communities that speak the language (Deng & Ng, 2017). When neoliberal ideology combines with elitism, they stir extremely uneasy feelings especially for those who do not speak the “correct” language and, thus, decrease their sense of belonging and make them feel they are the “frauds” in higher education (P. H. Collins, 1993; Mountz et al., 2015).

Moreover, on-campus workshops and training programs offered for GTAs are just another part of the competitive strategies which universities employ in meeting the needs of increasing enrollments so that they secure their place in the market (C. E. Sleeter, 2009). On-campus workshops provided for the GTAs may be helpful for developing their teaching strategies and raising their awareness about the importance of clarity as well as immediacy in teaching. These efforts are usually associated with positive classroom interactions and thus, better classroom experiences (Fitch & Morgan, 2003). Meanwhile, such an offer also “enacts the logic of neoliberalism in higher education” which “compels graduate students to act in ways that can be read as responsible and capable of navigating an increasingly bleak academic labor market” (Vander Kloet & Aspenlieder, 2013, p.286).

The Other GTAs are further marginalized through the official knowledge of cognitive psychology perpetuated on campus. In this neoliberalized form of “self-care,” individuals hold personal responsibility for their emotional wellbeing (Lloro-Bidart & Semenko, 2017). What is problematic about GTAs’ experiences is mostly a result of the very nature of the academy which is conservative and restrictive, yet it often claims that it is a place that values freedom and autonomy in individuals (Gonzalez et al., 2002). However, the dominant managerial class often emphasizes an “individualistic rather than structural understanding of power and privilege” (Duncan, 2014, p.57). This convinces us to look for external help from psychotherapy for

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substance abuse, which fuels even more problems since counselors sometimes fail to systematically examine how multiple social and cultural factors may influence students' experiences, resulting in further isolation and marginalization in GTAs (Arthur, 1997; Lee & Rice, 2007; Mountz et al., 2015).

Rather than looking into the unique situations of individual GTAs, we label and categorize them simply based on a single dimension they reveal about themselves. Multiple spaces are generously provided for personal meetings with professionals from the field. This reductionist view about human beings is problematic since it overlooks the complexity of human life, the "interlocking nature of race, class, and gender" (p. 38), which is located in almost all social institutions (P. H. Collins, 1993). We are people in relation; we often are shaped by, and subordinate ourselves to, the dominant institutional and even broader social discourses (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). How can one assess the Other teacher's character without knowing the details of the circumstances he or she faces?

As a member of the landscape, my intention of claiming my voices in our institution is satisfied with the attention I was given in these therapeutic spaces. Through the sharing of my stories as well as those from my colleagues, we reveal our victimhood in our institutions. I found relief and comfort in these stories not because I came to the realization and solutions for my subordination to the power relations in my institutions, but for my acknowledgment of the normalization of experiences similar to or worse than those of my own.

These seemingly safe spaces provided on campus usually created two realities for individuals. On the one hand, we embraced the official institutional ideology of freedom, equality, equity, and fairness as well as justice for all of its members. However, would it be wise for one to exercise his/her right to speak freely when they are in an unequal power relationship

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(P. H. Collins, 1993)? Under neoliberalism, those who deny this reality are the incompetent ones who blame external factors for their own failure.

On the other hand, as the Other teachers, we have been fed up with this unending diet about rights, agency and freedom, which are also defined through the prevailing ideology and principles of the market (Giroux, 2002). We sense that there is something pathologically wrong and as the Other teachers, we crave the truth hidden underneath the needs of dramatizing our daily practices, in order to align with the idealized images held by the dominant culture about a given performance.

Neoliberalism, which not only governs our behavior but also induces us to govern our mind in particular ways, is penetrating all aspects of our life (Lloro-Bidart & Semenko, 2017). We have moral fetters – we are not only subject to institutional surveillance, but we have also developed reflective surveillance of ourselves to continually measure ourselves with external indicators (Archer, 2008; Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Lynch, 2010). At times, when I was clearly being treated unfairly, as the Other teacher, instead of questioning the problematic power dynamics and being courageous about speaking up about my situation, I questioned the emotions I expressed at the workplace since they are beyond the established polite norms. I worried that my emotions may also be considered unprofessional and unbecoming behavior in an academic setting (Santiago et al., 2017).

Experiences of the Other GTAs

One cannot examine the experiences of GTAs without fully addressing how race, class and gender shape parts of who we are, and how those factors provide people with lenses through which we are viewed (P. H. Collins, 1993). Any research which explores only one dimension of GTAs' experiences in their institutions is at risk of oversimplifying these complex issues. In this

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part of the chapter, research on GTAs' experiences will be examined, which reveals how GTAs' intersecting identities including gender, race, social class, and cultural orientations influence their experiences in neoliberal contexts. Even though each identity category is presented separately, this project seeks to explore the issues faced by GTAs as intersectional in nature.

A metaphor of heart disease might be helpful in order to show the importance of how each factor mentioned above affects the experience of the Other teacher. For heart disease, the more unhealthy habits a person possesses (such as unhealthy diets, lack of exercise, etc.), the more he or she is at risk of developing heart disease. The same analogy applies to the othering process as well. The more factors a person has that deviate from the desired image for a teacher, the more vulnerable he or she is and, thus, the more challenging it will be for them to survive in their career (Vargas, 1999).

Gender. Gender can be an issue for both men and women depending on the nature of their institutional context. To begin with, neoliberal ideology breeds a culture of compliance through constant surveillance; hence scholars need to perform to externally controlled performance indicators in order to be seen as responsible and employable (Lynch, 2010). Performativity is genderless, however, in an academic settings, it is usually men who do the surveillance work and women are positioned as the caregivers; hence, women tend to be more sensitive to the dominance of masculinist values and practices within the academy, especially when positions of power are disproportionality held by men in their institutions (Lynch, 2010).

Moreover, women are more vulnerable to the neoliberal discourse of agency and autonomy. At the superficial level, it seems like neoliberalism appears to have acquired a growing interest in empowering females by emphasizing the importance of giving women a role in economic development (Cornwall, Gideon, & Wilson, 2008). However, the purpose of this is

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to serve the interest of Capital and this is far from what feminists might have desired. Unlike the traditional feminism which challenges the status quo of the gender hegemony of society, the new type of women's image perpetuated by neoliberalism is surrounded by the idea of "the never good enough girl" and one has to perpetually observe and remake herself in order to be accepted (Tincknell, 2011). As Tincknell (2011) continues arguing that in the neoliberal age, femininity is figured as bodily and emotional; dependent rather than autonomy and female's participation in the society is mainly for the commodity consumption which is often related to the hyper-commodification of female body as an objective of evaluative gaze (p.85). The relentless broadcasting of the ideal female body type in the digital media has created many anxieties within women, which makes them more susceptible to the neoliberal ideology.

As mentioned earlier, gender can also be an issue for male academics. For instance, in the department of education which tends to have higher proportions of women, male educators' masculinity can also be problematic (Archer, 2008). Male educators may also face numerous challenges due to stereotypical views people hold about their gender, for instance, they may suffer from gendered suspicions of sexual predation (Weaver-Hightower, 2011).

On the other hand, being male can also be an advantage in teacher education due to the frequent calls for more male teachers in English speaking countries, which are made based upon the fact that the teaching profession has become "feminized" and it could have negative effects on the education of boys due to the lack of male role models (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004). In order to recruit and retain more male educators, some states have initiated programs such as F2MTC (Future Minority Male Teachers of California), which is aimed at improving the pipeline for male teachers of color throughout the California State University system so that they can

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serve as the role models for students of underserved communities (“Future minority male teachers of California,” n.d.).

Race/Ethnicity. Archer (2008) and Santiago et al., (2017) both suggest that young scholars of color tend to be more vulnerable to the “othering” within the academy partly due to the stereotypical views people hold about their race (for instance negative assumptions may be made about Brown women and Asian students’ literacy abilities). In this part of the paper, I will try to document how domestic students of color and international students experience higher education in similar and different ways.

To begin with, domestic people of color working in academia often face hostility from white students and faculty colleagues as they are seen as benefiting from Affirmative Action (1961) (Duncan, 2014). Moreover, different domestic ethnic groups may experience higher education differently due to their minority status. For instance, compared to African American students, Hispanic doctoral students overall have better experiences and more likely to receive graduate teaching and research assistantships (Nettles, 2018). Consequently, minority status also influences college students’ mental health. For example, Cokley, McClain, Enciso, & Martinez (2013) suggest that African Americans often experience higher minority status stress than Asian Americans and Latino/a Americans, which is an important correlate of students’ mental health outcomes.

On the other hand, international GTAs are facing more problems when compared to their domestic ethnic minority colleagues. To start with, international GTAs’ silence in their workplaces is usually mistaken as a sign of disinterest and being apathetic despite their overwhelming desire to be accepted and succeed in their department (Lee & Rice, 2007). Little consideration is given to how sensitive they are about their language abilities, their sensitivity to

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prejudice and their psychological dilemmas (Lee & Rice, 2007; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000).

In higher education, GTAs are left in vulnerable positions, and their work is unfairly assessed at times (Santiago et al., 2017). When undergraduates are asked for opinions about their international GTAs, students' descriptions usually are demeaning merely because they are foreign and male international teaching assistants tend to be viewed more negatively when compared to female GTAs. Furthermore, when teacher misbehaviors are attached to international GTAs, they usually take on a more sinister tone (Fitch & Morgan, 2003).

Moreover, international GTAs may feel like uninvited guests who lack trust in their professional avenues, particularly in departments with little diversity (Lee & Rice, 2007; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). International GTAs also share a consensus about how elitism has manifested itself in higher education, and they often feel they are surrounded by individuals who are always mindful of prestige, status, and fame (Gonzalez et al., 2002). As a result, they tend to report more unsettled feelings such as discomfort or inhospitality when working at the university; yet, it is difficult for them to articulate or identify the exact source of such discomfort (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Double "othering" of GTAs can be expected when other factors such as gender intersect with race. For instance, women of color of academia are less likely to find spontaneous support, such as mentoring, when compared to their white male peers (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Besides, women of color also often asked to change their interests and agenda to better accommodate the needs of the other colleagues so that their identity and body will not be taken as a disruption to the status quo (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Santiago et al., 2017). Moreover, women of color in academia are also more likely to agree that their research is not

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valued as much by their colleagues, and there are many unwritten rules which members of the other groups find easier to fit in (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

Simply adding people of color to white-dominated programs without transforming the contexts usually undermine the potential contributions of these scholars in academia. The Other teachers have to be “superheroes” or “ten times” better in order to succeed. At the same time, they need not be overly competent since that is a threat to the established norm of the society where women of color should not be placed in powerful positions (Vargas, 1999).

Social Class. There is no denial of the existence of race issues in America; however, sometimes, it is more about social class (Lee & Rice, 2007). As mentioned earlier, neoliberal corporate culture defines civil society based on narrow economic relations. Thus, social class specific issues and racial injustices are usually canceled out at the workplace (Giroux, 2002).

In higher education, working-class and working poor students frequently do not feel supported (Langhout et al., 2007). Consequently, they experience marginalization and isolation more often when compared to the other students. These feelings are so robust that even decades after their graduation they continue to hold the same views about college when recounting their experience (Langhout et al., 2007).

Social class is partly about money and partly performative in that the person must be able to function in the dominant class. It depends on our social class, at times teachers need to be “inauthentic” so that we can meet the neoliberal image of academics (Archer, 2008; Langhout et al., 2007). For instance, academics of lower social class tend to adopt various interpersonal strategies in order to fit into the dominant “posh” middle-class ethos in their departments which allow them to play the game better (Archer, 2008). As a result, working-class students tend to experience feelings of inauthenticity and discomfort more often in academia.

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GTAs' social class can also create difficulties in their teaching practices since people tend to be more receptive to those whom they perceive as similar to themselves. For GTAs of the poor/working class, their differences might be interpreted as lacking objectivity by their middle-upper class students; and when race intersects with social class, the Other teachers (such as African American and Latinos) bear another layer of stigmatization since those from the middle-upper class could be expected to belong to the working class due to their race (Vargas, 1999).

Individualistic Cultural Orientation. Neoliberalism has transformed universities into highly individualized enterprises, which have allowed a particularly careless form of competitive individualism to flourish. Within this capitalist academic system, those at the top of the higher education hierarchy gain more benefits compared to the foot soldiers who do the lower level teaching and caring work (Lynch, 2010). This individualistic, careless, and managerial neoliberal culture sends a strong message to GTAs and especially those who want to continue working in academia after graduation about who belongs and who does not. Meanwhile, this study is conducted within the Appalachian setting which is a region also characterized with traits including individualism and self-reliance (Colliver & Warner, 1979).

Underrepresented minorities tend to hold communal work goals which help them buffer difficulties in life, and they focus more on connecting with and caring for others at work (Morgan, Isaac, & Sansone, 2001). For example, Native American students working in the STEM fields often feel uneasy since their departmental culture supports individualistic goals which focus on agency, promoting the self, gaining prestige, power, and independence; as a result, for those students who hold communal goals and the desires of giving back to their community, they tend to experience significant difficulties in fitting into their STEM major (J. L. Smith, Cech, Metz, Huntoon, & Moyer, 2014).

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People from middle- and upper-class contexts tend to value individualistic goals which promote agency as well as promoting the self, compared to those of the lower class, who usually hold collective values which help them to buffer life's uncertainties (Hamamura, Xu, & Du, 2013). The highly individualized entrepreneurship further marginalizes Other teachers in higher education. The former denies the interdependence as well as the neediness of the human being and allows careless individualism to flourish, which takes advantage of those who do the caring work in higher education (Lynch, 2010).

Lastly, individualistic culture in higher education also influences international students' experiences studying in American universities in different ways; for instance, international students from European countries tend to have less negative experience about their time at American universities when compared to students from the rest of the world (Lee & Rice, 2007). However, this is not to suggest their life is easy. Some of them report difficulties in integrating with their classmates due to the individualistic attitudes from their colleagues who are more likely to embrace the idea of personal competition and individual initiative so that they can stand out among their peers (Duncan, 2014; Lee & Rice, 2007; Owens, 2008).

Summary. At times, we feel that we are betrayed by the academy's rhetoric of being open to any idea or possibility (Gonzalez et al., 2002). However, GTAs are also not positioned to question, and we are not given the opportunities to ponder over our situations either since the legitimate truth perpetuated by our counselors suggests that we should let go of the past, stop "bitching" about it, and move on (Gutiérrez et al., 2012). As mentioned earlier, one way to dehumanize individuals is to deny the reality of their experiences as well as their emotions (P. H. Collins, 1993; Lynch, 2010). Doctoral education has often ignored that doctoral students are stakeholders as well (Gonzalez et al., 2002). Becoming an academic is not a straightforward

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process; it involves conflicts, instances of inauthenticity, marginalization as well as exclusion (Archer, 2008). Instead of denying their experiences and concealing the power relations in higher education, graduate students' experiences should be systematically examined instead, in order to prevent institutional practices which may cause further marginalization and exclusion (Archer, 2008; Gonzalez et al., 2002).

Research Gaps

In the process of researching the literature on GTAs' experience in teacher education, I found several gaps. To begin with, the question regarding the demographics of GTAs in teacher education in America is unaddressed. The United States Department of Labor (2017) provided some information about the total number of GTAs working in U.S. universities. In May 2017, the estimated number of GTAs working in American universities was 136,820. A career matching platform called Sokanu (2018) sheds light on the ethnicities of GTAs working across higher education institutions. Among them, 57% are White, 14% are Asian, 2% Middle Eastern, and 1% Native American. Data explicitly addressing the demographics of GTAs in teacher education seems non-existent. Most of the research regarding GTAs' experiences is conducted at the university level, especially in the STEM field; little research is done to address GTAs' experiences in teacher education.

Secondly, research on international GTAs' experiences mostly focuses on the documentation of their negative perceptions and difficulties when studying at American universities. Little research has critically examined the underlying reasons for their struggles in higher education. As a result, many researchers emphasize socializing international students with the host culture rather than considering the inadequacies of the host societies, which should be resisted and changed rather than accommodated. The purpose of this type of research, most often,

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is aimed at increasing the retention rate and the enrollments of international students, which contribute to the universities' financial gains (Fitch & Morgan, 2003; Lee & Rice, 2007; Sherry et al., 2010).

Thirdly, dichotomous thinking is prominent in the research on GTAs' experiences, especially when gender or race is mentioned. Instead of studying human experiences shaped by oppressive institutional structures, this type of research focuses heavily on the rhetoric of "us vs. them"; "white vs. black"; "man vs. woman," etc. This dichotomous thinking locks us in a dangerous place since it makes us believe our issues are mainly caused by one another and have left the broader social contexts unexamined.

These literature gaps highlight the need and the significance of future projects. In the next part of the paper, a discussion of my Foucauldian theoretical framework will be provided along with discussion of intersectionality as an analytical tool. This framework supports a critical examination of how GTAs' experiences are discursively shaped by the exercise of power in higher education institutions.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The Tale of the Mystical Mirror

In many cultures, the meaning of the mirror is not simple and direct. Instead, its significance is embedded in and at the same time reflects certain cultural beliefs. In Gloria Anzaldua's (2012) well-known feminist autobiography *Borderlands/La Frontera*, her mother covered up all the mirrors in their home with blankets when her father passed away. She did this out of the fear that the children's souls might travel past the mirror. In her culture, the mirror is a door that leads to the world of the dead. Across the Pacific Ocean in my home country of China, similar lore passes from one generation to the next. When I was a child, families covered up mirrors in their homes when newborns were brought into this world. As Chinese, we believe that the mirror, as a door to another world, may bring evil spirits to capture the souls of vulnerable infants (Gan, n.d.; "Mirror superstitions - Superstitions related to mirrors," n.d.)

Folklore has spread across borders into different parts of the world long before the internet became a phenomenon, before industrialization and the birth of the railways, and maybe even before the Age of the Exploration (Propp, 1984). Nobody knows the exact time and the origins of these tales, yet people of different cultural backgrounds have derived similar meanings from mirrors at specific times. Paralleling what Anzaldua (2012) and I both have experienced, in the Jewish religion, the same practice of covering mirrors is also carried out when someone has died, so that the spirits of the deceased can move on to the afterlife (Sanofsky, 2012). In these stories, the mirror is a border, which draws an invisible line between two territories, the living and the dead, a border which can be created for protection.

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Mirrors have continued to haunt me even when I became an adult. At night, as I have walked past the mirror in my bathroom, I keep my head down in order to avoid looking directly into it. I am afraid of glimpsing devils from the dark side, which may travel to the world of the living through the mirror. I have never mentioned this secret fear to anyone because even with my rational mind, the existence of ghosts is incredulous since they are not verifiable with scientific measures. However, if I am so convinced of my own rational mind, why am I still trying to walk past the mirror as fast as possible in my restroom to avoid being devoured in the middle of the night? As a human, I am trapped in my own body, which is overly analytical and highly skeptical as well as incoherent and illogical. I am all of these things at the same time. Maybe I am in, as Anzaldua (2012) refers to it, a *Coatlicue state*, a term that means the contradictory, the fusion of opposites, the living “in-between-ness” as well as the effort to make sense of the negative forces shaping people’s experiences and diminish a sense of self (Carbonell, 1999; Yarbrow-Bejarano, 1994).

This is what Anzaldua experienced as a woman with complex multiple identities continually grappling with life in the academy. This phenomenon is also what Foucault (1988) would call the plight of “the madman.” Of being “neither here nor there.” All of this provides an allegory for my own journey as a graduate teaching assistant and for the complicated, culture-infused stories that many of my classmates and colleagues have shared with me over the past several years. This theory of contradiction, of fragmented, shifting borders, of home-less-ness in the academy is one element informing how I will theorize the narratives of graduate teaching assistants in this dissertation.

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The Madmen of Higher Education

In the neoliberal age of reason, all sorts of people who are unwilling to be structured into the economic model of competition (Metcalf, 2017) are deemed irregular and abnormal and are confined and treated in “asylums.” The “madman” can only be released when he (or she) is able to imitate all the formal requirements of social existence and display such behaviors in a congruent and orderly manner. This is the case in Foucault’s (1988) masterpiece, *Birth of the Clinic*.

As Foucault (1988) continued to explain in his writing, those who were disobedient and unwilling to be treated were physically and/or mentally excluded, which was both salvation and atonement for madmen. The formula of exclusion was established with the lazar house (historically a place to quarantine people with leprosy); leprosy was the madman’s disease as well as his suspension from society. Through the segregated practices used on the lepers, the number of lazar houses decreased over time, hence the formulas of exclusion were validated and they continued to be carried out ritually (Foucault, 1988).

In these mental retreats, the madman is placed within a moral element where he will be in debate with himself and his surroundings which kept him in a perpetual state of anxiety (Foucault, 1988). As Foucault (1988) further pointed out, the madman is not in a reciprocal relation with the keeper of the asylum. Instead, he must feel morally responsible for everything within him that may disturb morality and society, and no one is responsible for the punishment he receives. The madman can only return to his liberty when he objectifies himself as a responsible subject who is aware of his guilt and able to reason with others (Foucault, 1988).

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Foucauldian analyses and power have found their way through modernity into the present (e.g., Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Holloway & Brass, 2018). Indeed, the ancient organization and disciplining of the bodies and then souls of Others has its implications, however implausible it may seem at first consideration, in higher education and particularly related to the experiences of diverse GTAs. The rejection of the madmen provided a basis for the modern ritual of exclusion in the field of higher education.

As the “madmen” of higher education, graduate teaching assistants’ experiences are often shaped by neoliberal ideologies such as competitiveness and efficiency and they are likely to experience more issues and are often directed to counselling service provided on campus (Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015; Brunila, 2014). Neoliberal governmentality sees humans as individualized, self-autonomous decision-making agents who are responsible for their own personal survival and wellbeing. They should not be the dependents of society (Bondi, 2005; Brunila, 2014). Neoliberalism governs and controls the soul not by crushing the subjectivity of the individual, but by harnessing the whole personality through the alignment of neoliberal political, social and institutional pleasures as well as desires (Bondi, 2005; Brunila, 2014). The purpose of which is to produce individuals who are free from psychic and emotional chains as well as vulnerabilities so that they eventually become self-autonomous and disciplined individuals, which are desired by the neoliberal marketplace (Brunila, 2014).

In *The Birth of the Asylum*, Foucault retold a story from Samuel Tuke who turned his asylum into the place that no longer punishes the madman’s guilt. Instead, it organized the guilt of the madman as a consciousness of himself which places the madman in a perpetual status of vulnerability (Foucault, 1988). Parallel to the madman’s experience, neoliberal self/ “technology of the self” adjusts people into the neoliberal market place, and makes the modern madman

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conform without using force, which leads to a diminished self who implicitly learns to find and blame himself for his own mistakes (Brunila, 2014).

The madman's abandonment was also his salvation, and his exclusion offered him another form of communication with his soul. The marginalized status of the madmen forced them to enter the *Coatlicue state* described by Anzaldua (2012), through which they struggled to identify their personal and collective denial, eventually leading to their understanding of the contradictory actions they experience in higher education (Wallace, 2009).

Foucauldian Interpretations of Power

For Foucault, power and knowledge are not seen as independent entities but are inextricably related; knowledge is always an exercise of power and power always a function of knowledge ("Power/knowledge," 2016). From a Foucauldian perspective, power is everywhere, it is pervasive and diffused into different levels of society; it is in flux and up for negotiation (Gaventa, 2003). Power/knowledge about certain practices cannot be examined outside specific discourses; it is always embedded in certain social, cultural and historical contexts. For instance, the symptoms of mental illness as mentioned above, or sexuality as a specific way of talking about/confessing sexual desires and fantasies (Foucault, 1990), is not an objective fact and it only appears at specific times in Western cultures, all as a means of control (Hall, 2001).

Instead of viewing power as an imposing and negative force which one can only accept and upon which self-identities are constructed; as mentioned in Chapter One, this project takes the stance of resistance by considering how people may understand and resist power since according to Foucault, one can never gain complete freedom from power. However, one can turn power into a positive and productive force in society (Butin, 2001; Gaventa, 2003).

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Positioning Theory, Foucauldian Analysis of Discourse and Power

Under neoliberalism, public institutions are remodeled along commercial lines as corporations, which have been encouraged to pursue entrepreneurial qualities (Peters, 2001). Accordingly, a new type of personality is needed in order to navigate neoliberal relations. At times, people need to talk up their own capacity as much as they can so that they are able to stand out when competing with their peers; they also need to show desires of continually seeking out risks as well as challenges (Verhaeghe, 2014). The neoliberal audit culture rewards those who display the most desired characteristics with more freedom, yet punishes those who are non-conformists to neoliberal values through structural exclusions. When the time of punishment comes, people have only themselves to blame for their failure in making rational choices as well as a series investment decisions at crucial points of their lives (P. H. Collins & Bilge, 2016; Peters, 2001). The neoliberal systems “doses” us – it speaks and acts through our language, purposes, decisions and social relations (Ball, 2012).

In the field of education, teachers are forced to reposition themselves in order to align with neoliberal values that saturate institutions, which increasingly operate as businesses (Holloway & Brass, 2018; D. Saunders, 2010). In democratic societies, collegial supports among teachers are emphasized, and teachers are also encouraged to collaborate with historically disadvantaged communities in order to achieve the agenda of social justice (C. Sleeter, 2008). However, under neoliberalism, teachers need to reposition themselves so that they align with the neoliberal educational beliefs and values, which are primarily shown through their communication strategies. These strategies allow one to speak and construct stories in a way that shows his or her intelligence so that he or she can stand out among the competitors and colleagues (Harre & Langenhove, 1999).

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The term “discourse” is usually a linguistic concept, which simply refers to passages of connected writing or speech. Foucault, however, gave it a different meaning: “A discourse is an institutionalized way of speaking or writing about reality that defines what can be intelligibly thought and said about the world and what cannot” (“Power/knowledge,” 2016). To be more precise, Foucault argues that discourse is knowledge/power which governs how ideas are meaningfully discussed and put into practice. Consequently, discourse constrains different ways of talking and defines certain ways of conducting oneself in order to build relations and construct knowledge to specific topics; physical things as well as actions are only meaningful and become the objects of knowledge within discourse, which is also the heart of constructionist theories of meaning and representation (Hall, 2001; D. E. Smith, 2005).

Discourse in higher education is purposefully designed in many cases; it is often highly political and concerns with the forms of power that emerge in institutional regimes (D. E. Smith, 2005). In order to understand and properly respond to these social discourses, one has to possess certain social knowledge about the types of practices and values as well as identities acted out in certain social contexts (Gee, 2015). In higher education, in order to be recognized and accepted by professors as well as their students, GTAs usually need to pull off a complex performance. For instance, under neoliberalism, the act of teaching and the subjectivity of the teacher are both profoundly changed within the new management panopticism (of quality and excellence) and the new forms of entrepreneurial control (through marketing and competition) (Ball, 2003). In order to be viewed as responsible, GTAs at times need to purposefully polish their language to show their alignment with the neoliberal education agenda.

In the neoliberal higher educational context, GTAs need to reposition themselves in order to align with the neoliberal values and beliefs which are embedded in three interrelated policy

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technologies: the market, managerialism, and performativity (Ball, 2003). Performativity refers to culture, a mode of regulation that controls people by employing rewards and sanctions. Specific techniques and the evaluative criteria of performance vary depending on who is in control in specific educational contexts. Under neoliberalism, individuals not only need to position/reposition and align themselves with the desired image of a teacher, they also need to compete with their colleagues in order to differentiate from one another so that they can stand out and improve themselves in the neoliberal impression management system (Ball, 2003). In the neoliberal educational context, collegial support is substituted with competition among teachers, and a new education community is formed, one in which all teachers assume a common professional identity while engaging in multiple forms of competition with each other.

One way of helping GTAs better assimilate into the neoliberal culture is to get them familiar with the discourse that circulates the higher education space, through apprenticeship with which the newcomers are able to learn the correct ways of talking and thinking, which will allow them to enter the new discourse (Hennessey, 2015). Newcomers can ease their way into a new discourse by being around members of the group and adjusting their language in order to gain a sense of belonging (Gee, 1989, 2015). The process can be summed up by the phrase, “fake it till you make it”.

In the process of repositioning themselves by aligning with the neoliberal values, GTAs need to mediate the multiple identities they possess, and also discard parts of who they are. Consequently, they tend to experience instances of inauthenticity as the results of both internal and external conflicts. At times, they question the legitimacy and validity of the truth, which is perpetuated by specific social discourses. Since from the Foucauldian perspective, all truths and knowledge are radically historicized, truths are valid only within certain historical contexts. Take

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the meaning of madness as an example. Back in the late eighteenth century in France, abnormal mental states were taken as pathology and were an integral part of their colonizing agenda in North Africa, yet doctors used morality and propriety as a way of “fixing” abnormal behaviors in order to build a civilized colonial order in the Islamic states (Bullard, 2001). As Bullard (2001) continued to explain that mental illness in all periods, border-crossers’ transgressions revealed suppressed and hidden desires. Yet, they were interpreted differently in order to suit the needs of those in power. Hence, truths such as the interpretations about madness do not remain stable across different historical periods (Hall, 2001).

At times, GTAs’ epistemological concerns and internal conflicts are framed as madness on campus and are sometimes treated through counselling centers. From there, they enter the *Coatlicue state*, a state which is full of contradictions. On-campus services only treat the symptom of their madness instead of helping them to understand the conditions through which their madness is formed. This is especially true for those who are members of social groups which affiliate with the formal discourse of higher education, their initial discourse can often be incorporated, resonate, and facilitate their acquisition of the official discourse of higher education (Gee, 2015). Hence, for the GTAs, especially those who come from socially underserved communities or who are ESL learners, they tend to experience more instances of inauthenticity, stress as well as resistance in the process of cultural assimilation.

Intersectionality as an Analytic Tool

Intersectionality is generally used as an analytic tool to understand, analyze, and solve complex problems that people face in their world (P. H. Collins & Bilge, 2016). The uniqueness of such a tool lies in the fact that historical social movements usually only elevate one category

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of analysis at a time, and these single-focus lenses are inadequate in order to address complex social problems and the entirety of the discriminations that people face during certain periods of their lives (P. H. Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Intersectionality as an analytic tool examines major axes of social divisions at specific historical periods at the same time instead of dissecting these factors (such as race, gender, social class, etc.) as if they are mutually exclusive from one the other (P. H. Collins & Bilge, 2016). The choice of using such an approach lies in my own experiences working in higher education. As a member of the landscape, in the process of seeking to understand my own experiences, I have learned many similar stories from a variety of colleagues across different disciplines of studies and each of them was positioned differently in the “matrix of domination” (Particia, 1990, as cited in Angelucci, 2017) and experienced disadvantages in various ways as well, which makes each of them differently vulnerable.

When combined with a Foucauldian framework and positioning theory, the process of intersectionality analysis is not a prescribed method which yields clear and objective truth; instead, it is always an interpretative process (Graham, 2005) through which the narratives of the participants will be examined from different angles as suggested by the term intersectionality itself, all within the Foucauldian power framework. One way of connecting intersectionality with Foucault’s concept of power is to see intersectional categories not only as “special minority issues” but also as conditions for more privileged and powerful people, and how someone becomes marked/unmarked, privileged/non-privileged, as well as how these process are produced and sustained through power in higher education (Staunæs, 2003, as cited in Bomert, 2015). In doing so, this research may reveal how neoliberal power relations manifest in GTAs’ everyday activities. By probing their experiences over time, I hope to reveal invisible and

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insidious yet prevailing practices that affect GTAs' lives and work (Ball, 1995). Moreover, in adopting such a combined framework, this study will challenge the existing power structures and hence serve to help liberate their souls from the effects of power, which they were first formed through. The ultimate goal of this study is to provide readers with insightful understandings about how the convergence of multiple forms of oppression are simultaneously positioned in neoliberal systems, modify and interact with each other in complex ways through every day discourses and practices (Jordan-Zachery, 2007; Phoenix, 2006).

Using intersectionality as an analytic tool is not without criticism and challenge. One of the major issues is the implicit assumption embedded in this theory that members of oppressed groups are the best people to judge their experiences of oppression, which can create paradoxes since people who are similarly oppressed may have different interpretations of similar events (Cooper, 2013). Besides, researchers who use intersectional analysis are often criticized for having too many categories of analysis, and for failing to address each of them adequately. One way of solving this problem is that the researcher needs to be strategic and make creative decisions about which are the most relevant intersections for specific groups or individuals on particular issues (Phoenix, 2006).

Research Questions

In order to explore the experiences of graduate teaching assistants' experience in neoliberal education settings, the following research questions will be carefully addressed in this project:

R1. According to GTAs, how are neoliberal power relations constructed in their daily activities related to their positions and identities?

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R2. How, according to GTAs, have these relations influenced their interactions with their professors, colleagues and students?

R3. How do GTAs understand and mediate the conflicts they encounter in their daily lives and how do they make sense of their experiences?

R4. What ideas do GTAs suggest for better navigating neoliberal power relations?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people construct meaning and make sense of their worlds as well as the experiences individuals have (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research is distinguished from quantitative research in several ways. To start with, qualitative researchers collect data in natural settings rather than in controlled environments (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). Instead of being *objective*, the researcher is the key instrument in the qualitative study; their worldviews guide their research process. Moreover, qualitative inquiry embraces an emergent design process which means all phases of the research are subject to change (Creswell, 2007b). Qualitative research is often needed when the inquirer wants to achieve a sophisticated, detailed understanding of a phenomenon instead of being interested in finding a simple cause-effect (Ormston et al., 2014). Qualitative research serves the purpose of this study well since this project aims at exploring how the intersectionality of complex layers of GTAs' identity in teacher education (such as race, gender, social class, etc.) hinder or facilitate their interactions with their students and colleagues, as well as the larger institutional contexts.

Stories and Narrative Inquiry

Humans are storytelling organisms and we lead storied lives individually and socially (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Our lived and told stories have taught us to be compassionate as we navigate the difficult realities of daily life; living with and responding to the stories of others keeps us relevant and humane in ways that no metric can measure (Clandinin, 2006; Mountz et al., 2015).

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Narrative inquiry works with detailed stories drawn from participants, and these stories allow us to understand how the personal and social contexts are entwined over time in individuals' lives (Clandinin, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Wertz et al., 2011). In other words, a narrative is a story (L. A. Rex, 2011). In education, stories are the form in which teachers most often use to represent their experiences (i.e. Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Rex, 2011). Critical examinations of teachers' stories allow outsiders to understand how teachers continuously negotiate between our value-laden personal belief and the moral demands of social citizenship (L. A. Rex, 2011). As GTAs, telling our stories about the critical moments we experienced during graduate school will not only help us inquire into our current teaching practices and contexts, but also open up new possibilities about more productive teaching practices, enabling us to enact power as moral beings (Bell, 2002; Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007).

Theoretical Perspectives and Research Elements

Narrative analysis as a method elicits narrative knowledge primarily through the detailed examination of human's stories. Narrative analysis is usually closely linked to social constructionist theory (Gray, 2014; Sparkes & Smith, 2008). Narrative constructivism and narrative constructionism are the two main strands of inquiry that have played out most often in narrative studies in recent years. The former focuses on the inner/mental process used when the individual engages in social interactions; meanwhile, the latter considers the narrative as a form of social action through which humans construct, perform and enact their sense of self (Sparkes & Smith, 2008). Narrative constructionism is emphasized in this study. It focuses on how contextual, linguistic, and relational factors combine to determine the kinds of human beings that people become and how their views of the world develop instead of viewing people as isolated knowers and only focusing on individualistic experiences in constructivism (Raskin, 2000). In

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narrative analysis, truths and meanings do not equal factual accuracy; instead truths are carefully crafted and negotiated between the narrator and the researcher, the purposeful selection of bits of context is crucial in shaping how the statements are understood (L. A. Rex, 2011).

The Foucauldian theory of power was also employed as part of the theoretical framework in this study since the educational enterprise is fundamentally political and enmeshed in social as well as cultural contexts, the understanding of the operations which are crucial in achieving social justice (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). Studies drawing from Foucault's works (i.e., Souto-Manning, 2014; Zembylas, 2003) focus mostly on the relationships between power and knowledge, as well as how they are used as a form of social control through societal institutions. The employment of Foucauldian analysis of power turns the conventional narrative analysis into a critical one. In other words, critical narrative analysis is when narrative analysis is used critically by going further to examine the interactions between personal sense making and how this process is influenced by the social processes, instead of simply focusing on the accounts (Emerson & Frosh, 2004). Some of the assumptions lying beneath this method include the thought that ideas are mediated by power relations in society and certain groups are privileged over others by exerting an oppressive force on subordinate groups. In this study, through GTAs' reflections of these tense moments in graduate schools, critical narrative analysis will capture a complex picture of GTAs' experiences and how the power relations in neoliberal educational settings interpenetrate individuals' sense making (Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

In qualitative studies, researchers need to carefully spell out and justify the underlying assumptions of their particular methodological choice in order to make their readers take their research outcomes seriously (Crotty, 1998). In this study, data was collected primarily through narrative interviews in which participants shared their stories on some significant moments about

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their work at graduate school (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). My interactions with my colleagues led me to the realization about the power of storytelling that, hence, inspired me to choose this method for my study. These stories that we exchanged with each other over the years of graduate school helped us gain consciousness about our struggles with fitting in, our encounters with both macro- and micro-level aggressions from students, peers, faculty, community members, and our status as *Other* teachers in our institutions.

Hopefully, the discussions presented above are useful in ensuring the soundness of this study. In the following parts of this paper, I will discuss the details of how I carried out this project. As mentioned multiple times across this chapter, critical narrative analysis was an emergent process, and the research design process was not fixed. Instead, it was negotiated with those involved in the study.

Role/Positionality of the Researcher

At times, interviews were not taken as a scientific method since different interpretations of the same interview passages often occurred due to the specific lenses the interviewers used to examine the text in an analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Indeed, the ways we analyzed and interpreted interview transcripts revealed our personal and social stances (Frost, 2009; McCormack, 2000).

Narrative researchers like myself cannot bracket themselves out of inquiry. We need to realize how we are positioned, and how we shape and are shaped by the field of inquiry (Clandinin, 2006). Hence, at the onset of this narrative study, I needed to find ways to interrogate the set of beliefs and practices that I brought to the inquiry endeavor since my personal experience served as an important resource for theoretical insight (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009; Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2007a; Gonzalez et al., 2002). Narrative researchers are not the

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scribes of stories; instead, we live alongside participants and collaborate with them by actively involving them in the process of negotiating narrative meanings, hence adding a validation check to the narrative analysis (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009; Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2007b).

As a GTA, I live alongside my participants. This has granted me knowledge yet, at the same time, biased views about the lives of GTAs. In order to make transparent my own thoughts, I kept a research journal to record my thoughts, feelings and memories, and my questions along the journey of data collection and data analysis. The purpose of the researcher journal was to show how I drew on personal and professional discourses to impose pre-given meaning on texts. I strove to provide clear statements about my interpretation alongside these. In Chapter 5, I discussed reflexively the dilemmas I encountered in the process of data interpretation.

Research Design

The Phenomenon of Inquiry. This study investigated GTAs' experiences in neoliberal educational settings and critical narrative analysis was used to achieve a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of inquiry. Four research questions were addressed:

- R1. According to GTAs, how are neoliberal power relations constructed in their daily activities, related to their positions and identities?
- R2. How, according to GTAs, have these power relations influenced their interactions with their professors, colleagues and students?
- R3. How do GTAs understand and mediate the conflicts they encounter in their daily lives and how do they make sense of their experiences?
- R4. What ideas do GTAs suggest for better navigating neoliberal power relations?

Significance of the study. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) suggest that a central element in narrative inquiry is the justification of the reasons why the study is important. The

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justification should occur at three levels: the personal, the practical, and the social (see also Clandinin & Huber, 2010). At a personal level, this project is significant because dialogue between the *Other* teacher and the researcher creates a space in which they all find the strength to resist dominant power relations in their institutions. Hopefully, their stories continue eliciting feelings, and their resistance strategies can be useful for other members in the field.

Moreover, at the practical level, when teachers “trouble the water” in pursuit of understandings about differences and marginality for both themselves and their students, they are able to generate extended discussions of critical social issues in their classrooms as well as their professional relationships, which is important for their wellbeing (L. A. Rex, 2011).

Lastly, at the broad social level, with the help of Foucault’s (1995) framework of power, this project revealed not only individuals’ experiences but also some of the problematic “exclusive yet normalized” practices in higher education in which the *Other* teachers’ experiences are shaped. As Willis (2003) suggests, “Narratives written by scholars and teachers of color, as authentic voices of our experiences should be included,” (p. 69) in order to avoid a superficial examination on the interaction of race, class, gender, etc. in higher education institutions.

Study context. This study is set within a Carnegie classification “very high research activity” institution in a small city located within Appalachia. The institution has many accredited teacher education programs currently serving more than 500 students. I have worked as a GTA instructor in numerous undergraduate and graduate level courses in its teacher education programs over the past four years. These courses have included Professional Inquiry, Instructional Design and Evaluation, Advanced Teaching Strategies, etc.

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Participants. Convenience sampling was employed in this study (Merriam, 2009). I sampled five current teacher education GTAs from this institution. The participants possess intersectional identities (including gender, race, social class, and cultural orientations) that were varied and that positioned them to live and tell compelling stories of teacher education in this institution. This was a convenience sample in some respects, yet it was also purposive in that I selected as representative a group as possible based on complex intersectional identities of individuals working in teacher education, which also served as the rationale for the sample size (n=5). Information about the identities listed above was collected through self-report. Please see Table 1 below for their background information:

Table 1

Participants' Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Region	Self-reported social class	Number of Years' Experience at the Institution
Michael	Male	White/USA	Working	5+ Years
James	Male	White/USA	Middle	4 Years
Nadia	Female	White/Iran	Middle	3 Years
Maggie	Female	White/USA	Middle	1 Year
Tina	Female	Black/USA	Working	2 Years

The rationale for this sample with a wide range of identities was to avoid dichotomous thinking, in which “persons, things and ideas are conceptualized regarding their opposites” (Collins, 1993, p. 36). As mentioned, research on GTAs’ experiences tends to use the rhetoric of

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“them vs. us” to show the victimage of GTAs of color. Dichotomous thinking is problematic since it oversimplifies the complexity of GTAs’ experiences in neoliberal educational settings. My experiences as a GTA have led me to the realization that the *Other* teacher can be anyone, and this is not only limited to GTAs who come from historically underrepresented communities since as mentioned in previous chapters, everyone struggles in neoliberal education contexts due to their narrow views about human beings. As human beings, we all struggle in different ways for similar reasons in the same social context. In this study, information about specific higher education institutional and political contexts was juxtaposed with individual narratives from participants in order to show how neoliberal ideologies interpenetrated GTAs’ experiences.

Data Collection

Narrative interviewing. In narrative analysis, the researcher spends a considerable amount of time with the participants in order to gather their stories from multiple types of information (Creswell, 2007b). In this project, data was primarily collected from in-depth semi-structured oral interviews conducted over the span of three months. For the semi-structured interviews, the researcher prepared a list of open-ended questions to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order and during this process, the interviewer followed the guide, but was able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that strayed from the guide when appropriate (“Semi-structured interviews,” 2006).

At the onset of the study, I received consent from the participants for their participation so that I could videotape the interviews. During the interviews, participants were given adequate time to reflect upon critical incidents/events which caused relatively high levels of embarrassment or pain. This was important for understanding my research questions in depth, since humans cope with situations based on the strategies we have learned from our memories

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about past critical events (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007a). Critical moments are unanticipated, yet have long-lasting/life-changing consequences (Webster & Mertova, 2007a). I needed to listen attentively to what was said and how it is said; in the meantime, I made connections with interview themes, which was a necessary condition for later questioning (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Throughout the process, follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant so that I could ask further questions, which allowed me to probe into the phenomenon and gain a complex understanding of individuals' experiences. Moreover, publicly available documents about the contexts of the study were carefully examined to support participants' answers to the research questions. These additional interviews and examination of public documents allowed me to achieve a holistic understanding about the social context of which the narratives from the GTAs were situated in (Huber, Clandinin, & Huber, 2006; Sherfinski, 2018). It was important to attend to the social contexts of the participants since they contribute to a person's sense of who he/she is (Huber et al., 2006). Please see Appendix A for the initial interview protocol. These questions were addressed during the three interviews, since as the researcher, I gave the participants as much time as they needed to share their stories in detail.

Other data sources. Narrative analysis situates individuals' personal experiences in a larger social context. Thus, in narrative analysis, it is equally important that researchers strive to collect as much information as possible about the context of the stories (Creswell, 2007b). Different methods were used to achieve this objective. In this study, narratives written by myself (my research journal) and publicly available documents describing university and teacher education contexts were also examined. Please see Appendix B for my research journal.

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Data collection process. In this study, I gathered the stories from each participant (n=5) about their experiences as graduate teaching assistants by carrying out three semi-structured interviews between May 2019 and July 2019. Each interview lasted from 60 minutes to 160 minutes. I video recorded each interview with a Canon camera as well as on my iPhone as a backup (audio only). Then I uploaded all the files to my personal laptop (password protected) as well as the Cloud service provided by my institution (protected with a two-factor authentication login). All the files were deleted from the memory card used in the Canon camera afterward. Field notes were kept along the way in which I reflected upon my own feelings and emotions during the interview as well as questions for the subsequent interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis preparation. In this study, data analysis starts with transcribing the recorded interviews. Once the transcription was complete, I read it while listening to the recording and correcting any errors. The transcript was also de-identified so that the participants could not be identified from anything that was said (Sutton & Austin, 2015). During this process of checking and re-reading, as the researcher, I also developed a sense about the overall participants' experiences of the phenomenon in question. The second step in data analysis was initial noting (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). In this step, the researcher aimed to produce comprehensive and detailed sets of notes and comments on the data, for critical narrative analysis at a later stage. The research journal was a record of ideas and reflections so that I was able to establish an intense relationship with the data which enables me to feel a heightened sensitivity to the meanings contained therein (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). The whole interviewing process was an ongoing back-and-forth with the participants in order to make deeper meanings.

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After the initial data collection, I transcribed all the audios through the website *Otter.ai*, which recorded audio and converted speech to text using voice recognition algorithms. It also synchronized the audio with the text during playback, so that I could tap on any word to hear exactly what was being said at the time (J. Newman, 2018). *Otter.ai* does not yield perfect transcription, hence after the initial automatic transcribing I spent a considerable amount of time correcting the transcripts by listening to the audios multiple times. This active listening helped me to connect with the storytellers and I gained a deeper feeling about their stories (Frost, 2009). This process took place between July and August 2019.

I printed out all the transcripts and started my initial noting process; this process was guided with some of the notes I took after the interviews. I kept several questions in mind during this step including who my participants were, what the main events in his / her story were, how I positioned myself in relation to him/her, how their stories resonated with some of my own, as well as how I responded to these stories emotionally and intellectually (McCormack, 2000). I set down my thoughts as well as questions in my notebook and I talked with my professor on the phone every week on Wednesdays during the initial noting process. In these conversations, we talked about my initial findings, concerns, and questions as well as brainstormed ideas for my data analysis.

Data analysis. Elements of Labov's (1972) method of textual analysis is employed in this study. After initial noting, identifying the narrative processes begins by locating stories which are characterized by a series of linked events and recognizable boundaries (McCormack, 2000). To my ear, my participants' stories are usually clearly defined and follow an expected temporal order as the results of the interview questions I purposefully designed at the onset of the study (Appendix A). After initial noting, I applied Labov's (1972) model which provides a

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means of reducing stretches of text to identifiable narratives, and the meaning of the stories will then be investigated at a later stage of the data analysis (Frost, 2009; Saldana, 2016). There are six elements embedded in this model (Lyon, 2008) and they are :

Table 2

The Six-Part Labovian Model

1. Abstract	What is the story about?
2. Orientation	Who, when, where?
3. Complicating Action	Then what happened?
4. Evaluation	So what?
5. Result	What finally happened?
6. Coda	A “sign off” of the narrative.

In this step, I aimed to reconstruct the stories of the participants. After reducing the entire transcript into isolated stories, I then identified and reported those most reportable events, which were experiences that had the most significant effects upon the participants in the narrative and were the most relevant to my central research question (Labov, 2001). These stories were informative and provided me with insights into the participants’ life as graduate teaching assistants in their institutions. After reducing stretches of participants’ interview text to identifiable narratives, identifying a story’s structure was the starting point for my analysis (L. A. Rex, 2011). Please see Appendix C for an example of how I applied this model in my study.

However, simply listing isolated events from the past will not make it narrative; the researcher needs to tie these stories together with a metaphorical string which makes past events relevant for the “here-and-now” in order to make a narrative meaningful (Bamberg, 2012).

Hence, during narrative analysis, it is also important for the researcher to reflect upon the set of

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values and beliefs brought to the inquiry process (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). This is particularly important given my critical framework.

Coding. In this study, *narrative coding* was first employed. This type of coding was appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participants' experiences and actions in stories (Saldana, 2016). *Versus coding* was used in the second coding cycle. Versus coding was appropriate since this method reveals strong conflicts, macroaggressions, or competing goals within, among and between participants and studies of opposing norms and values systems (Saldana, 2016). This coding method fits well with the Foucauldian power analysis framework, as discussed in Chapter 2. Then as the researcher, I moved on to the next transcript, using memos to help me make connections between the individual narratives. After the completion of the first two rounds of coding for all of the transcripts, *pattern coding* was used in order to explore the common experiences shared by this group of GTAs.

In my study, I combined patterns, categories and codes, checked them with the field notes taken during interviews, and then wrote up descriptions where the answers to the research questions were compiled and addressed as a whole (Morse, 2010). The artifacts and other publicly available documents describing the study contexts were examined as well to bring additional depth of understanding to the analysis; they were used to add or subtract "truth value" to participants' stories but rather to contextualize them in relation to the neoliberal university. Eventually, parts of the data were given back to the participants for fact checking, and whether they and I accurately represented their experiences. Further negotiations with the participants and remaining questions were carried out via email when needed.

Writing. In narrative analysis, it is not clear when the writing begins; however, a sense of the whole needs to drive the writing as well as the reading of narrative (Connelly & Clandinin,

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1990). In order to make it a narrative, the researcher needs to link critical events in a chronological order and the explanatory structure for linking events should be clearly stated through the narratives provided by the researcher at the beginning of the narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Aside from attending to the common themes which emerge from participants' stories and arranging these stories in chronological order for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of inquiry, a critical narrative writer also needs to attend to disruptions and contradictions by deconstructing the stories (Creswell, 2007b).

Trustworthiness

The following discussions about trustworthiness issues are based on Shenton's (2004) interpretations of Guba's (1985) constructs of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Credibility. In narrative analysis, participants may construct stories that support their interpretations of themselves instead of what actually happened. They sometimes exclude experiences which may cast them in a negative light. In narrative analysis, our inquiry goes beyond specific stories, and our aim as researchers is to explore the assumptions underlying those stories. Thus, no matter how fictional participants' stories are, they still provide a window into their beliefs and experiences (Bell, 2002). However, it is still advised that researchers should use tactics to encourage participants to be honest. In order to avoid misrepresentations of the participants' experiences, the transcript of the first round interview was given to the specific participant when possible in order to make sure everything was correct. The initial individual analysis was also sent to the participant to comment on the accuracy of the interpretations when this was possible (Bolderston, 2012). Moreover, follow-up interviews were arranged with the participants when necessary in order to fully address the four research questions in this study.

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In order to ensure the credibility of the study, data triangulation was used. Individuals' accounts of their experiences were verified against one other in order to obtain a richer picture of the phenomenon of inquiry (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, data collected from this study were also compared to emerging research about GTAs' experiences in neoliberal higher education, which allowed the researcher to contribute to a richer view of reality (Dervin, 1983).

I made sure to give multiple debriefing sessions to my doctoral committee. Through these discussions, I was able to develop new ideas and find alternative approaches. I discussed potential flaws related to the research methods (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, the field texts the researcher recorded, the reflective commentary about the research process along the way, as well as the researcher's personal and professional information relevant to the phenomenon (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) were partially provided in order to ensure the credibility of this study. Lastly, as the researcher, I hoped to achieve a thick, detailed description of the phenomenon, which contributed to the credibility of this study.

Transferability. *Transferability* refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to different contexts or settings with different respondents (Bitsch, 2005). In order to increase transferability, I provided a detailed description of the inquiry and was purposive with my participant selection (Anney, 2014).

However, it is equally important to note that, unlike quantitative researchers who embrace a fixed and measurable reality, qualitative researchers assume a dynamic and negotiated reality. Hence, in qualitative studies, it is almost impossible to demonstrate that the findings of one study can be applied to another group of people in another context (Shenton, 2004). Thus, as a qualitative researcher, the goal of ensuring transferability is to provide detailed description about the research context so that the participants can make comparisons between the instances

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of the phenomenon described in the research report and their own setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical considerations. In narrative analysis, ethical considerations are of prime importance throughout the process due to the relational nature of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers need to take responsibilities for the privacy and well-being of their participants. Several strategies were employed in my study, in order to resolve ethical dilemmas and make ethically informed decisions. Three types of ethical problems were addressed: the researcher/participant relationship, the researcher's subjectivity in data interpretation, and the research design itself (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000).

To begin with, the researcher and participants' relations are crucial in qualitative studies and in order to ensure an equal and caring relationship between the researchers and the participants, researchers need to strive to create an environment where participants are allowed to share their concerns through the entire inquiry process. Moreover, the research may also encounter problems of misrepresentations of the participants and those involved in their stories when coming from an ethical high ground, hence causing harm since stories have lived consequences long after the stories have been told (L. A. Rex, 2011). Besides, confidentiality can also be an issue. In order to ensure the participants' identities of this study are not revealed, the transcript was de-identified ahead of the analysis.

Analyzing data may also present ethical problems, since as the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative studies, the researchers may exclude essential data which are contradictory to their views (Merriam, 2009). Once again, one way of resolving this issue is to provide a detailed description on the preconceptions that the researcher carries into the research in order to explain to readers the rationale for the decisions made in the study.

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Lastly, the data collection technique of interviewing also possessed its own ethical dilemmas (Merriam, 2009). Detailed information about the research (such as duration, activities, locations, etc.) was provided for the participants through a consent form prior to the study. During the process of storytelling, some stories shared by the participants clearly evoked feelings of discomfort based on the emotions revealed. It is important for researchers to plan for these situations ahead of time in order to avoid potential ethics risks, for instance, excluding data when it is deemed to place participants at risk in some way (Wang & Geale, 2015)

Chapter 4: Findings

The study explored Graduate Teaching Assistants' (GTAs') experiences of teacher education in a neoliberal academic institution. I wanted to understand how the intersecting identities that each of us carry influence how we interact with our environment and how each of us is positioned differently by the system due to the multiple layers of identities we possess.

There are two parts to the data analysis section: The Participants' Life Stories (Chapter 4) and the Shared Group Story (Chapter 5). In this Chapter, I will spell out the details of each of the participants' life stories in a chronological order and show how each of the participants is influenced differently by neoliberal ideology due to the intersecting identities they possess. Each narrative begins with their life story prior to being admitted to their doctoral program, then I will move on to the critical moments which happened during their GTA years and lastly, their thoughts on how to navigate and resist the neoliberal power relations within their institution.

During this process, the social contexts specific to their situations will be examined. At times, my own voice will be included in order to explain how I tie these stories together as well as the reasons for why I chose to interpret stories in a certain manner. All of this, I believe, made the narratives of the participants meaningful. Lastly, the overarching themes shared collectively by the participants as a whole group were derived from the analysis of individual interviews provided in Chapter 5. Moreover, this study also provides suggestions for policy changes at the end of this paper.

Participants' Life Stories

Nadia's Story

She understood then what Nana meant, that a *harami* was an unwanted thing; that she, was an illegitimate person who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance. ... She thought of her entry into this world, the *harami* daughter of a lowly villager, an unintended thing, a pitiable, regrettable accident. A weed. And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back (Hosseini, 2007, p.328).

As of 2017/2018, the tally of Iranian students in the U.S. was 12,783, and almost 76% of them studied at the graduate level (*Open Doors Report*, 2018; Ortiz, 2016). The number of Iranian students in the US has been heavily influenced by the relations between the two countries, hence it has varied drastically over the past 30 years (Slavin, 2017).

Doctor Joseph Plumb Cochranan, an American Presbyterian Missionary, helped to found and directed Iran's first modern medical school (the Westminster College) in 1879, before the two countries established formal diplomatic relations (Afshar, 2017; Slavin, 2017). The US has become more deeply involved with Iran during the Second World War (1939-1945) (Graham Royde-Smith & Hughes A., 2019), and they continued to be close allies in the Cold War (1950-1979) (Shannon, 2019). However, the US started to be viewed more negatively since 1953, when US and British intelligence agencies began a trade war with Iran and orchestrated a coup to expel Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, who wanted to

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nationalize the country's oil in order to gain back control of their own assets ("US-Iran relations: A brief history," 2019).

In November 1979, the US embassy in Tehran was seized by protesters, and American hostages were held inside for 444 days ("US-Iran relations: A brief history," 2019). This hostage crisis was caused by the collapse of the US-backed Shah's regime, which sought to Westernize Iran ("The hostage crisis in Iran," n.d.). In the following year, the United States broke ties with Iran, and aside from banning American exports to the country, the U.S. also expelled Iranian diplomats ("Iran-U.S. Relations: A Chronology," 2000). During Clinton's administration, Iran was isolated and sanctioned due to America's accusation of supporting terrorism, seeking nuclear weapons, and trying to derail Middle East peace ("Iran-U.S. Relations: A Chronology," 2000).

Nowadays, Iran is still under constant US sanctions that prevent it from exporting oil and importing goods, which are crucial for its people's survival (Cashman & Kharrazian, 2019). This has caused a wave of protests in Iran in recent years, and as economic pressures rise, marginalized Iranians are increasingly pointing fingers at the rich and powerful of Iran, since the poor have suffered disproportionately under the sanctions (Dehghanpisheh, 2018). Despite the suffering of the poor, the US still views these pressures positively since they curb Iran's military and political expansion in the Middle East (Dehghanpisheh, 2018).

These political and military tensions between the two countries made it extremely difficult for Iranian students to apply for the US visas, and their applications are usually subject to enhanced screening, which often take months to complete (Navabi, 2019). Moreover, these macro-political discourses unavoidably influenced Americans' opinions towards Iranians at the

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micro-level. In a recent report published on *GALLUP*, approximately 82% of Americans have unfavorable opinions towards Iran, and more than half of Americans believe that military actions should be taken against Iran when necessary (“Iran,” 2019).

Amidst all the political mayhem are ordinary people whose fates and futures are closely related to the destiny of their country. They are exploited by the rich, and sacrificed for the disparate economic interests of the most privileged in the world during the process of globalization. Their emotions are often dismissed, and their voices are usually ignored because of how little the life of an ordinary person weighs in the grand scheme of things. Among the many struggles of the Iranian students, this is one story about Nadia, a female teacher educator who lives in the United States, who is both a “traitor” to and the victim of her own country. She fled her country because she was against a series of political decisions the Iranian government has made, including the repression on women’s rights and the international relations among Iran, the US, Israel and Palestine, etc. Yet, she cannot escape the fate of being misperceived by the people in her new host country, the US, because of her nationality.

When examined from a Foucauldian perspective, her story reveals the paradoxes of global neoliberal discourses and how they have influenced micro discourses and interactions in higher education spaces as well as how disciplinary power has been exercised towards her, and hence created a “fragmentation of the self.” In narrative analysis, the “united/fragmented” dimension refers to whether self-narratives are deemed as consistent and coherent or as more situational, diverse and flexible (Sandberg, 2013). Through her story, she also revealed gentle ways of pushing back and how she tried to reposition herself in order to claim her own subjectivity as a teacher of color in the neoliberal workplace.

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Nadia is a 37 year old female Iranian. She got her master's degree in Library and Information Science in Iran. After that, she worked as an English teacher with K-5 students for several years. In January 2013, she came to the United States with her husband on an F2 visa, which is a nonimmigrant dependent visa that allows the immediate family members (including spouse and children under 21 years of age) of an F1 student visa holder to relocate to the United States (Gogol, 2020). Nadia then went through several required tests in order to pursue a doctoral degree in education; however, she was later denied. Then she decided to get a second master's degree instead and got accepted by the Department of World Languages, Literature, and Linguistics at her institution, T University, which is located in the city of Green. In the meantime, she worked as a GTA in the Intensive English Program for a year. She started her Ed. D in Curriculum and Instruction in the Fall of 2016 at the same institution. During that time, she also worked as an assistant librarian for three years. Her job was to teach first-year engineering students about how to find and use reliable resources through the library database. In the meantime, she also co-taught three classes with one of her professors in the Education Department. This was an unpaid job done for course credit only, due to the 20 hours' weekly working limits imposed by her immigrant status. She now lives in the West Coast area of the US with her husband and her newborn daughter, and she would like to continue working in higher education after graduation.

I am a Muslim from Iran, or am I? Nadia and her husband came to the United States in January 2013. As soon as they landed at the airport in Istanbul, Nadia decided to take off her hijab before she got on her flight to Washington DC. In Iran, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the hijab has become compulsory, and women are required to wear loose-fitting clothing and a headscarf in public ("Police in Tehran say women will no longer be arrested for not wearing a

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hijab,” 2017). As an Iranian, after the age of nine Nadia had to wear a hijab in her country to cover her hair and neck.

Many Western scholars believe that compulsory hijab is just one manifestation of a ruling system that seems to have criminalized every opportunity for young Iranian girls’ self-expression (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). Moreover, the mainstream Western media also often associate the physical form of hijab with “terrorism” (Ruby, 2006). Muslim women who wear hijab are often perceived as the ones who lack agency and have lower education as well as academic capability, and they need to be freed from oppression (Rahmath, Chambers, & Wakewich, 2016).

However, this understanding of Muslim women who wear a hijab and the hijab itself is quite limited and misinformed. As Ruby (2006) suggests, the hijab can be interpreted in different ways. Sometimes it refers to the traditional physical garments, and sometimes, it refers to the modest clothing that does not include coverage of the head. Moreover, it also refers to the modest behavior of women in daily matters, and this is a fundamental aspect of the hijab (Ruby, 2006). Some Muslim women choose to wear hijab in the Western world in order to reaffirm their identity as Muslims; in the meantime, others choose not to do so in public so that they can control the visibility of specific attributes due to the misperceived image the Muslim women often have to bear.

Nadia mentioned in her story that for outsiders to the Muslim world, they often had very little understanding of the various types of Muslims as well as different interpretations of the hijab in the Quran (D3 L140-141). Not all Muslims need to cover up, and they are still Muslims (D3 L148). For Nadia, she took the symbolic meaning of hijab, which refers to the modest behavior of women. She is a loyal Muslim, who can “never, ever, ever, convert” (D3 L53-54) to any other religion, and this does not change whether she wears a hijab or not.

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Nadia's decision to not wear her physical hijab in the United States came out of her fear of being further marginalized, especially in a racially homogenous city such as Green: "With my accent, with my skin color, with my hair color, it shows that I am not American. I didn't want another symbol of like, making me, I mean, marginalized in society because of my hijab" (D3 L132-133). Nadia views the physical form of hijab as a symbol of "closedness" to the outside world, she does not want to be viewed as the "other" in her new homeland, and hence, the hijab which is often seen as a negative cultural symbol by the Western world needs to be hidden (D3 L174-175).

Nadia was very well aware of the judgments she might face when this outward religious symbol intersected with her nationality. However, not wearing a physical hijab didn't prevent her from discrimination when studying at her institution. She recalled in her interviews that one professor made comments about her culture:

'I know the culture and country you come from might be blah, blah, blah.' Something like that. But this is America, and you should do blah, blah, and blah.' You know, she thought that being from Iran and Middle East is like I am kind of pervert, I am not well educated! I can't think. I can't follow the rules. So it's like, I am not civilized (D3 L384-389).

There was also one time that one of her professors treated her differently and made uninformed comments on her paper about how she should not allow her husband to be her boss, and she should follow her dreams:

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I believe she doesn't have any idea, what, how my husband looks like, how well educated and open-minded, and he is actually never forces me to do something. I am not pleased with that (D3 L377-379).

It is actually quite often that Muslim women are usually perceived to be lacking agency as well as academic ability (Rahmath et al., 2016). When sharing these stories, she had anger in her voice because of her professors' misperceptions about her as a Muslim woman from a country that is usually associated with terrorism. In the interviews, she was eager to show that she is not a passive victim of the Muslim society whose life is ruled by her husband and other male relatives. As a colleague of mine, Nadia was always trying to position herself as an easygoing, submissive, and harmless person who is quick to forgive. However, during the interviews, she showed a different side of herself that I was unaware of. She seemed to be fearful and angry at the same time, because of how she believed some people may perceive her Iranian Muslim identity:

My country is, is on top of the news, okay? On top of the media, they are talking all about like a bombing, attacking Iran. Attacking Iran is on the table. ... When people ask me where you from, I never said I am Iranian. ... If I say I am from Iran, they will panic, they think, I have kind of bomb, or gun inside of my bag. So I didn't say, I just lied (D3 L530-536).

However, Nadia is by no means a passive and helpless victim of this social discrimination. Instead, she is an active agent who redefines her position in her life context and put this in her own words: "I am not the kind of person who listen (to others' put downs of me)" (D3 L192).

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For Nadia, one “push back” technique she uses is her choice about her visibility as a Muslim woman who comes from Iran. Depending on her audience, there are times she chooses to lie about or to tailor her Muslim identity as a way to protect herself and avoid causing discomfort in others. There are also times in which she chooses to be visible to the outside world:

I put so much effort on showing people that I am welcoming different people with different type of personality (D2 L19-220). In Iran, you can't be gay or lesbian, and you should be strict (D2 L23-224) ... So I started going to LGBT center.... I wanted to introduce myself. I started with where I come from and what's my religion, and also I believe in LGBT (D3 L226-228) ... So I am trying so much to show people that I am different, it was so hard because spending time, I spending so much energy, and so much energy, and I spent, sometimes I can say I spend money to show that I am open with everything.... that I want to live in this society (D3 L230-233).

Nadia purposefully chooses to reveal her identity towards the right audience; this visibility positioned her as an “ambassador for Islam” (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). This is her gentle way of pushing back the misperceptions the general public holds about her religious beliefs in the host country she lives in.

The one who does not know how to follow the rules. In January 2013, Nadia came to the US with her husband on an F2 visa. While studying for her second master's degree in the Literature & Linguistics Department at T University, she also worked as a GTA in the Intensive English Program for three semesters. This was her very first teaching experience in the US.

The Intensive English Program that Nadia used to work for was founded in 1979, and it is considered to be a well-established program for international students needing to improve their

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English proficiency prior to entering an academic course of study (“About,” n.d.). According to Nadia, each semester, they had students coming from all over the world, including students from Japan, Korea, Brazil, and mostly from the Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, etc. (D2 L119-125).

Teachers at the Intensive English Program (IEP) were expected to teach two to three courses each semester and they were solely responsible for carrying out teaching activities based on the given textbooks in order to meet the pre-defined learning standards for each course. While working there, Nadia taught two classes three times each week, which means she had to teach six classes total while completing her full time graduate work (D2 L133-135). For Nadia, things were hard at first because she had never had any experiences teaching young adults. While working in Iran, she was an English teacher to K-5 students. In the IEP, she had to learn how to interact with and meet the needs of the young adults in her class.

While discussing her experience working at the IEP, Nadia specifically brought up the role that her ethnicity played as a language teacher in such an environment. It seemed that being a non-native speaker sometimes put her in a disadvantaged place when compared to her American colleagues who are native English speakers: “So of course, it was easier for them to like preparing this. They just come to class, just to speak with the students and I should be more prepared” (D3 L 163-165).

Still, Nadia tried to focus on the positive, and she mentioned that her ethnicity actually pulled her closer to her Arab students who share similar cultural backgrounds, and students wouldn’t feel ashamed of asking her questions. Moreover, being a second language speaker also made Nadia more aware of what parts of the grammar may be challenging to her students, which

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contributed to a good relationship between her and her students. However, beneath this seemingly positive image of what Nadia tried to portray, the relationship between her and her students seemed far more complicated than what she described. As we delve into the details of her experiences later in the interview, it almost seemed like Nadia carried a certain level of anger towards her students, especially those of Arab origins:

And some of the students, they won't take your problems serious, because there is a plan that most of them, they have an assistantship, they won't pay out of pocket. They come to the United States and are learning language for free. I can say it's for free. They, they, I mean, it's not a loan. They come to the United States to learn the language. I am speaking about Arab students. And it is free for them. Because this kind of assistantship, their governments just offer them free money to come to United States learning language and go to school. And after two years, they can directly accepted to the university. So some of them, they won't, they will like, not serious at first. (D2 L250-260)

By “assistantship,” Nadia actually refers to the King Abdulla Scholarship. Starting in 2006, the King Abdulla Scholarship has invested \$5 billion dollars to fund 90 percent of Saudi Arabian students to study abroad, especially in STEM fields (Walcutt, 2016). In doing so, King Abdulla aimed at diversifying its economy and building a future after oil in order to make Saudi Arabia competitive internationally (Koch, 2014). In the IEP, the enrollment of students from different countries differed drastically depending on the global economic scene. In recent years, the total number of Saudi Arabian students has dropped by 46% since the government has been forced to tighten the rules of the King Abdullah Scholarship fund due to the drop in crude oil prices (Kottasova, 2016).

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On the other hand, Iran, as one of the largest crude oil-exporting countries, was under constant US sanctions and is often portrayed as the top sponsor of global terrorist activity (Morley, 2019). As an Iranian, unlike her Middle Eastern students, Nadia's country was never granted any share of the oil industry and yet she often had to bear the pain of being viewed with a lens related to terrorism:

Because this time, people, they easily talked about deport Muslim. And now Iran in the media. I saw some people when I say, I am originally from Iran. They treated me differently. And you know, this is, this gets worse and worse. We had a hard time in case of finding a job. In case of like my parents, they can't go and get visa come to United States, which is different from like India and other countries. ... Just because of my background, my nationality (D3 L495-502).

Nadia was inferior to her students in terms of the global social-economic standing of her country. Even though they all come from the Middle Eastern regions, her country is just not the right kind. Nadia was very well aware of discrimination based on ethnicity, since later in the interview, when talking about her relationship with me, she said:

Like comparing China to Iran, from the Iranian Revolution, we lost our position in the world, you know, they always consider us as a group of people, as a country that makes war, they are evil. ... But like in engineering department, most of the people, they like Chinese students. ... I think part of that is like, China has a better social economic situation in the world right now. So I think that, that's a good influence on how people treat you differently.... And you know, you are there, you have a powerful country in the world, my country is the worst one (D2 L679-693).

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However, little did Nadia know that my country is also always on the news in recent years and is often accused of stealing from the United States, from their intellectual property to military and trade secrets, etc. (e.g. Rapoza, 2019; Shepardson & Beech, 2019). Chinese students are also facing visa restrictions and a rising rate of visa rejections due to the deteriorating relations between the two countries after the trade war (Westcott & Wang, 2019). As her colleague, I am also afraid of how I will be viewed and judged by the people I work with.

Aside from her nationality, Nadia was also positioned at a disadvantage within the IEP due to the prevailing neoliberal practice carried out in such a space. IEPs are by now a prominent institutional feature at many U.S. public universities. The marketing of IEPs worldwide is part of the construction of a specific, complex web in which the dynamics of neoliberal practices are enacted in institutional sites and their discourses (Chun, 2009). Many universities have benefited from the revenues they collect twice from these international students: the high tuition for the IEP classes in which they need to enroll, and the subsequent higher international tuition fees for their university classes.

Nadia was marginalized in multiple ways within the IEP, which runs itself in a business manner. To start with, she was a service provider who tried hard to meet the needs of her “customers.” Secondly, the type of service she provided was questionable compared to her American colleagues, generally speaking, due to her status as a second language speaker since IEPs in U.S. universities function as a discursive space of neoliberalism, which not only aims at teaching the language itself but also a delivery system of specific interactional norms and speech-styles that are privileged across languages in ways that facilitate the processes of the global economy (Chun, 2009). In this case, what she deemed as her teaching assets became her

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deficit. Moreover, as a teacher, when working for the IEP enterprise, Nadia was held accountable not only for her own teaching but also the behavior of her students.

The IEP at T University was strict on students' absences, and as a new teacher, Nadia had little idea of this rule, and neither did her international students. There was one time that a few of her students, after they got their name checked by Nadia for attendance, went outside to smoke on the street. The administrator of the IEP saw them and yelled at Nadia because of this: "She uses some languages and also her volume rising a little bit. ... Because the door was open and her volume was higher than normal, so most of the people in the area in the other offices could hear her voice and how she is talking to me" (D2 L257-261).

Nadia questioned the fairness of her critique by saying: "But you know, based on my experience, I can't lock my student in my class" (D3 L253-254). The comment made by the administrator was not fair, Nadia believed:

I felt burned out ... After that, I treated my students differently, I mean, I changed my manner, and I told them the rules again, what is the rules, what would happen to them if they have absent, and more than three sessions and all these things. But other than that, I keep it to myself. I was sad for a couple of days (D2 L270-L279).

"So I took it to myself, maybe I am a little bit like sensitive, but I took it to myself" (D2 L257-258). In my opinion, this story shows how neoliberal ideology works at its finest form; as teachers, we are often held accountable for things out of our control, and when we fail to comply, we can only blame ourselves for our "failure" and absolutely no one else. Moreover, neoliberalism also controls teachers' behaviors by rewarding those who comply and punishing those who do not (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). For instance, the neoliberal audit culture carefully

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monitors and regulate teachers' behaviors and teachers need to demonstrate compliance in order to be seen as a responsible worker hence be employable by those in power (Kloet & Aspenlieder, 2013). The same ideology inevitably also cultivated a culture of fear within Nadia:

You know, this is, this was my job. So I needed that job. So who is gonna pay my assistantship if I don't get that assistantship? Who is gonna pay my tuition fee? So I just say, I just close my mouth. ... I think, most of the people, they are afraid of doing something over there. And guilty or accountability or responsibility. This could put them in trouble, so they won't go for that. ... People just follow their job description and sometimes, they don't want to go and pass these, like borders, the job descriptions, borders, you know (D2 L281-283, D2 L465-L474).

As Foucault indicated in his work, the exercise of power is not only about governing through repression, but also through incitement to act in particular ways in order to meet the expectations held by those in power (Kloet & Aspenlieder, 2013).

Lastly, it is also evident that neoliberalism has penetrated higher education through the heightening of intensification of workloads that people in academia usually have to take up (Kloet & Aspenlieder, 2013). Graduate teaching assistants usually are a source of cheap and exploited labor on the U.S. campus (Holterman, 2014) and this is also shown through Nadia's story:

You know, I shouldn't work more than 20 hours based on the rules. But the thing is, it happens a lot to me, in IEP that I worked a lot, but they never paid me for the extra for the month, the time I spent on the things (D2 L419-422).

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As we have seen from Nadia's story, these neoliberal efforts work together to ultimately shape teachers' attitudes and dispositions toward a capitalist ethos, embodied in the modern corporation (Agostinone-Wilson, 2006).

We are not equal. After she was accepted into her doctoral program, Nadia was able to work as a graduate teaching assistant at the library of her university. She worked there for three years. Part of her job was to teach freshmen engineering students about how to use different databases, detect reliable resources as well as how to use patents, cite and write reports, etc. Aside from teaching, she also had to work at the reference desk as a reference librarian.

Nadia quite enjoyed this teaching experience when compared to her experience at IEP. When she first started her teaching at the library, she was given a lot of autonomy in designing the curriculum since this program was a clean slate, and people had no idea of how this course might be taught (D2 L 291 - 292). Besides, her colleagues were supportive and provided constructive feedback about her class, which helped her teaching tremendously.

Similar to her experiences of working at the IEP, teaching at the library was not easy for her despite the amount of support she received from her colleagues, especially when it came down to dealing with discrimination from her students, who at times made fun of her accent. Nadia was often "corrected" by her students when she pronounced words in the wrong way or was not clear enough. Nadia said she tried to be indifferent to these voices by pretending that she never heard these things. She further mentioned that she was afraid of direct confrontation with her students because she didn't want to get picked on. Instead of direct confrontation, she tried to push back in gentle ways. She mentioned that one day when she walked into her classroom, the first thing she did was to write down the following sentence on the blackboard: "If some people have an accent, it means that they know one more language than you do" (D2 L421-422).

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When she finished the sentence, she said that no one ever talked about her accent in her class. This is her soft way of pushing back. When telling her story, Nadia mentioned multiple times that she didn't really care about what her students said about her accent. However, in the first interview, when reflecting upon the factors which may influence graduate teaching experiences, Nadia mentioned the same story in a different manner. She said that there were some students in her class who made fun of her accent, and she was agitated after this, and she tried to share her emotions with one of her professors after class that day. Later in the interview, Nadia mentioned that her professor explained to her that most of the students at T University actually grew up in and came from small towns and they have never seen any foreigners before.

From Nadia's story of working in the library, I am able to see how the neoliberal ideology and practices have penetrated into every aspect of her experiences and how they have created a fragmented reality for Nadia. To start with, the course she taught at the library was explicitly tailored towards the "audit culture" of the neoliberal marketplace. In recent years, we see more and more libraries have adopted the market-oriented strategy such as the job that Nadia took in order to distinguish themselves from the traditional libraries and hence survive (Yi, 2016).

Moreover, the relationship between her and her students was also influenced more broadly by neoliberal economic practices. Nadia's university is located in a coal-mining region. Under globalization, a greater economic recession impacts the demand for coal, a major product of the state. Coal mine lay-offs cause a lack of state revenue, which means that T University likely receives less money from the state's annual budget. Within the university setting, the library is usually the first group that loses its funding when budgets are tight or in crisis (McKenzie, 2020). For example, in Nadia's experience, the librarians had to figure out how to cut expenses like journal subscriptions. They increased revenue by attracting more students to

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take classes and hired cheap labor like Nadia to teach such classes: “It was a lot, it was a lot teaching, and they paid very low” (D2 L388).

When talking about her relations with her students at the library, Nadia was angry towards the students whom she believed partied all the time. She believed that they were not serious about their work at all. From my perspective, this appeared to be the same type of anger she had towards her Arab students from the IEP since she was placed at a lower/unequal position by the system when compared to her students in both settings:

I think students in Iran, somehow they are hard workers than some of my students here in the United States. They work harder, in Iran, they work harder, because it's a competitive situation, you know, you need to go to the good university, if you want to get a good job. So, most of the people, they work hard there, they try harder. Sometimes, I feel like some of the student, not all of them, part of the students, they don't take the education as serious as it could be, you know. Part of my education in Iran, it was free, because I went to the government university, even it was free, we work a lot, we worked harder. But sometimes, I think students in T University, they paid for courses, but they just fail easily, or they just get D or E, and they don't care about that. I don't know why they are not that hard work. So most of the people, they do whatever they can, spend as much money they have, to support the kids, to send them to school (D1 L396-425).

However, Nadia's observation and description of the native college students at T University seems quite far from the truth. In recent years, T University was facing budget cuts, and in order to survive, it tried to recruit increasingly more out of state students who would pay

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higher tuition when compared to the local students. In the Fall of 2018, almost half of the students at T University held out of state status.

Back in Iran, Nadia was raised in a middle-class family. Her father is a college sports teacher, and her mother is a physical therapist. Education in Iran works as a social ladder for upward mobility: “If you want to go to college, if you want to get a bachelor’s degree, at least you have to have a bachelor’s degree; otherwise, you would consider as a middle class. Education is correlated to your social status” (D3 L421- L423). Later in the interview, Nadia mentioned that in Iran, some public universities are free. However, this is not the case in the US. In recent years, students studying at public US colleges are facing spiraling tuition increases due to state budget cuts. Many come from low income and working class families in this state, which has the lowest college graduation rate in the US; many students must support themselves through college by taking out loans and working multiple jobs. In-state students who had a “B” average in high school and at least median standardized test scores received a scholarship from the state, which covered more than half of the in-state tuition. The university also offered other scholarships for high performing students, mostly those from within the state. Hence, students at T University are diverse in terms of the financial supports received but few received a free college education, as Nadia had. Although we did not discuss it explicitly, I am left to wonder how Nadia’s upper-middle class background played a role in some of the conflicts with the students she had in the library at T University.

Where do I belong? Things were not easy for Nadia outside of her teaching. On January 27, 2017, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order that banned foreign nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries (ACLU Washington, n.d.). Even though Iranians seeking student and exchange-visitor visas were later exempted from this executive order, still many of

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those applicants have been blocked anyway (Francis, 2019). For instance, in January 2020, an Iranian student with a valid visa attending Northeastern University was denied entry at Boston's Logan International Airport and subsequently removed from the country (Redden, 2020). In recent years, the U.S. has deported a growing number of Iranian students with valid visas from the U.S. airport (Hampton, 2020). It has always been comparatively difficult for Iranians to obtain a student visa and even if such a visa is granted, Iranian students often must endure isolation from their families until after graduation since the travel ban prevents virtually all non-student Iranians from entering the United States, hence blocking family members from visiting the country (Navabi, 2019). Nadia's life was undoubtedly affected.

To create her own community under such oppressive global conditions, Nadia usually went to a local Christian church on Sundays instead of the Muslim Mosque in the city of Green. She made this choice in order to build a supportive network for herself under the travel ban: "You know, part of that is like due to this travel ban, my parents can't be here, they can't get visa, so they can't do anything for me" (D1 L192-193). It was also near the same time that her husband had to move across the country to California for his new job, which left Nadia feeling lonely. The reason for her choice of going to a Christian church instead of a Mosque was out of her fear of being rejected by the latter, even though most outsiders would consider them the same kind. Nadia further explained that most Iranians are Shia Muslims and hence are not considered part of the Islamic group by those attending the Mosque near T University, who are mostly Sunni Muslims and often come from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, etc. (D3 L 38-40). She was just not the "right kind" of Muslim for the Mosque in town. Most of the people in the Christian church were professors and students of T University. They welcomed Nadia and never treated her differently even though they knew she was Muslim and that she would never

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convert to any other religions. However, things changed after Donald Trump took over the presidency; some people from the church started to treat her differently. When she shared her worries of not being able to see her parents again, some of them told her that she could leave the country if she doesn't like it, and this was not her place to stay. She stopped going to the church afterward. Nadia was utterly confused by how a group of seemingly open-minded people could change so drastically after the election. This is how macro politics influenced her micro standing in the community, in her words:

Iran is not what they show on media, Iranian people are different from government, most of the people that they come from Iran, but they are not accepting the policy, the international policy my country is making right now. I won't accept that, I don't like that. The reason I left my country, it was because I was against the political decisions that my country make in the past and in the future. And now, I am against that, that I am angry with the political, international politics decision my country makes nowadays and therefore, and a future, you know, it won't show me, my personality. But unfortunately, people don't know that, they don't have any idea, yeah, unfortunately (D3 L549-556).

When Nadia first came to the United States, she landed in the Washington Dulles Airport. Little did she knew that, four years later, it was in the same city, hundreds of protesters gathered outside of the White House, to protest a travel ban of Muslims from seven major countries issued by President Trump (A. Newman, 2017). All of the efforts she made during these years of trying to blend into her host culture seemed petty when compared to how easily people's opinions were changed by macro-political discourse.

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As I mentioned at the very beginning, Nadia hopes that she could be able to land a job in higher education after she graduates. However, in the world of academia, the pool of jobs for international students is considerably smaller since most of such jobs do not offer work visas and among all of the international students, Iranian students have been affected disproportionately (Kumar, 2020). Even before Trump's travel ban order, the road to American higher education has always been a tough one for Iranians and nowadays, many Iranian students are worried about whether they will be able to receive a visa for a job in the United States after they graduate due to the recent political climate changes (Sharafedin, 2017). Nadia is now particularly worried about her future of finding a job in an academic setting.

As an Iranian Muslim woman who is communally oriented, one major theme from Nadia's story is her overwhelming desire of being accepted by others in the process of "border crossing," both physically and metaphorically. However, the intersecting identities she possesses make her mistreated, misunderstood and marginalized from time to time even within the institutional and cultural contexts she used to live in.

In the next part of the paper, I will move on to Tina's story. Tina is another female participant. When being interviewed, she just started her doctoral study. As an African American graduate teaching assistant, Tina also faced many adversaries and discomforts in her first year of study. As female GTAs of color, Nadia and Tina both experienced marginalization from time to time. However, when juxtaposing the two participants' stories, I was able to show how each experienced inequalities differently due to their minority status (domestic vs. international). This shows how our intersecting identities influence the way of how we are positioned by neoliberal higher education systems.

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Tina's Story

Tina is a 38 year old Black woman who used to work as an English teacher at a local public high school in a small town near the so-called “religious belt” of the U.S. She stopped teaching after she had her son in October 2011. Her original plan was to have an extended maternity leave until March 2012, and then she wanted to go back to continue teaching. However, her plan was interrupted since her husband got a new job in T, a city near the Appalachian Mountains, and they all moved there. Her plan changed to be a stay at home mom. She had her daughter in 2013 and then she continued staying at home for two more years to take care of her children.

The idea of moving to the city of Green at first seemed horrendous for Tina since the majority of the population there was White, and the Appalachian context and specifically Green City, had certain connotations that made Tina feel uneasy as an African American. Tina was worried that as a Black woman, she might not feel as comfortable compared to where she came from, which is more racially and culturally diverse. Her husband assured her that Green City is a college town; hence the population is going to be more diverse compared to the rest of the region. However, Tina still experienced culture shock after she moved since for her, it was still “White all the time” (D1 L255). As a matter of fact, Black students have been severely underrepresented among graduate students and doctoral degree recipients in the United States (Nettles, 2018).

In 2015, Tina applied for graduate school, and she got her Master's degree in Instructional Design and Technology from T University. She started her Ph.D. in the Fall of 2018. When we spoke, it was near the end of the first year of her doctoral study and she hoped that she could complete her doctoral degree in five years. Now she is working on her doctoral degree in

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Interdisciplinary Studies at the same institution, with a focus on curriculum, instruction, literacy, and culture. To be more specific, she is interested in the African American culture within the Appalachia setting, which used to be a region that she had a lot of fears towards. During the interview, Tina did not fully explain the reasons underlying her fear of this region and I am wondering if this is related to the racism issues associated with central Appalachia, especially towards African Americans. For example, when former president Barack Obama visited the state where T University is located—the third-whitest in the country—two out of ten white Democratic voters expressed that they would not support a Black candidate for president (Stump, 2010). Moreover, the people from this state are stereotyped in the popular media. For example, in video footage of a popular talk show, a white woman from this region stated that she was “sort of scared of other races because we have such conflicts with them” here (Stump, 2010). These threads may contribute to the unsettled feelings that Tina had for this region.

When Tina first started her Ph.D., she got a teaching assistant position. However, in the midst of her assistantship, she was given a fellowship, which put a limit on the amount of money (no more than \$10,000 a year) she could make outside of this aid. Hence, she was unable to continue her teaching assistant position, she had to quit halfway through the school year. With the help of her professor, fortunately she was able to end her contract without any loss. As Alger (1997) suggests, faculty members can play a significant role in students' lives by making a conscious effort to act as mentors, particularly to students who have come from less privileged backgrounds or have overcome significant obstacles due to their minority status.

As to her family life, Tina is a mother of two children, a seven-year-old son, and a five-year-old daughter. While she was working towards her master's degree, her children were small and they both stayed at home all day, which made it very challenging and overwhelming for her.

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Now she is able to get more work done during the day since her eldest child goes to school.

Meanwhile, her husband works for the federal prison system and has always been the main person who supports the family. This has significantly reduced Tina's financial concerns while studying at graduate schools. Her husband is planning to retire in this region after 11 more years and Tina hopes she will be able to find a teaching position in a small or regional college or at an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) near Green City. Her ultimate goal is to be a researcher and a writer as well as an advocate for the type of research she is doing, which is about African American culture within Appalachian settings.

The fear of being wrongly perceived. When Tina first started working as a GTA, she was so worried and terrified about teaching despite her many years' prior teaching experiences. To start with, she was afraid her high school teaching style might make her college students feel intellectually insulted (D1 L331). Throughout the interviews, Tina mentioned multiple times that she was terrified of being asked questions she didn't know the answers to, or that she might say the wrong things to her students. The massive teaching load was also overwhelming for her as a mother of two and she had to learn how to juggle the multiple roles she played both inside and outside of the academy. Moreover, Tina suggests that it is hard to work as a TA when compared to a regular teacher at schools due to the liminal role that TAs play and uncertainty about the expectations of such a job (D3 L380-383). Financially, the graduate teaching assistant is also a high stakes position (D3 L404) since leaving the job meant she was going to be in a tremendous amount of student debt, while a regular teaching position pays much more (D3 L395). Moreover, higher education teaching experiences are needed especially if she wants to continue working in higher education in the future.

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Among all of her fears, Tina is worried about people's misperceptions about her race the most, which may make things more complicated and eventually influence her teaching evaluations: "I feel like Asian teachers or teachers with an accent get worse evaluations ... especially these kids who are from this area, or for one student who never met anyone" (D1 L763-766). She continues explaining: "I felt a big, common thing is like, people tend to be afraid of Black women. Like they think we're aggressive and loud. 'She is confrontational'" (D1 769-770).

Following this comment, Tina shared one story about what happened in her class in order to illustrate what she meant. In one of her classes, all of her students were working on their tasks quietly, and the weather was getting bad outside. One of her students made a comment about the weather outside since it started to rain, and Tina didn't hear what she said exactly. So she responded with, "Excuse me?" meaning "I can't hear you, could you please repeat that?" Immediately, the student said, "I am sorry" because she likely thought that Tina was sarcastically saying "excuse me" because she expected her not to talk out of turn. Even though everyone burst into laughter later, this incident still made Tina wonder if her students perceive what she said as an act of aggression: "Like, 'Excuse me, are you being serious right now?'" (D1 L777-778)

The struggle to fit in. Although Tina had all of these fears about how she might be wrongly perceived, still, she said she actually never had any race issues with her students. According to her, most of her students seemed more intrigued by her rural background, which allowed them to connect at the very beginning: "She is country, and I am country, and she knows what I am talking about" (D1 L801). However, outside of her teaching, there are also times that her rural background and her race make her feel uncomfortable and it is hard to fit into the "posh" culture of higher education:

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Some things, I don't understand, or even with food, honestly, like you know, I feel like some things I just wasn't introduced to as a child. And I don't really, I don't care for them still, and I don't know if that's a medical thing, or if it is just me not pushing through. But I mean there are just things that you know, I have to work through. Like, "Oh, I can't talk about how much I love McDonald's" in front of, in these circles of people (D1 L623-628).

Tina was raised in a Black, poor household in the Southern region of the US. She was aware that the way she speaks is quite different when compared to her other colleagues (D1 L635). She was afraid that she might come across as not being smart because of the way she talks or when she doesn't understand things well: "Especially in academia, because people, when they are talking, and they're talking, and they, 'Like did you get that?' And, I was 'Like what?'" (D3 L634-644) In order to "melt" in, Tina was under the tremendous pressure of mastering "code-switching" (Wallace, 2009) in the academic setting. She explains:

I am American, but I am from the South and I am Black in the South. There is a way that we speak that's different. ... I am just being very, just making this, wanting to always say the exact right word and right. You want to sound smart; you don't want to make mistakes. ... You want to say all the words the way you think people are expecting you to say (D1 L634-638).

The same also applies to academic writing. As an English teacher, she has a hard time writing in the academic style. She continues explaining that the school she went to was a low performing school which is located in the middle of nowhere and they didn't write very often, which accounts for her poor writing skills. When she started her Ph.D., she was under

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tremendous pressure to make her papers grammatically sound, because of her fear of being further stereotyped by her professors as well as her colleagues because of her race: “I feel like race plays a part in it, you know, I don’t, I mean, I don’t think that this is how Black people write because I am Black...” (D1 L688-689).

Outside of her teaching, her race also affects her relationships with her professors. For example, Tina explained:

Some students are more confident, basically, in approaching professors and demanding things of them. ... I am uncomfortable to begin with... I mean, it’s the nature of being a woman and being Black and being like, just me being self-conscious and not being assertive and not being confident in what I bring to the table. It is always wondering if I am bringing enough like, “Am I doing enough?” (D1 L1082-1087)

Moreover, Tina also struggles with her female identity in higher education, not so much related to the hierarchy of academia, but more about trying to be coherent among the multiple “I’s” embedded in her experiences as a female. The “I-positions” reflect different social, cultural, and economic expectations about what is meant by being a woman (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

When analyzing Tina’s interview transcripts, I noticed that her talk focused heavily on her children and her struggles of trying to perform the different gender expectations of the role she plays in her family life and work life. Tina was raised in a small Southern religious town where she met her husband, a White man, and got her first job as a high school teacher. While dating her husband, people were gossiping and suggesting to her that she was not setting up a good example for the other girls in town when she was always seen out and about with “her boy” before they got married (D1 L 527-529). The social discourse about being a “good girl”

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continued to haunt her when she started her first job. There was one time that the parents of one of her high school students complained about her mentioning her boyfriend in the class. The vice principal later had a talk with her about how inappropriate it was for her to bring up her boyfriend in the class, and what the appropriate behaviors for a teacher were. There was also a time that Tina was criticized for her outfit. It was at a faculty meeting and Tina wore a pleated skirt. Underneath it was a pair of leggings. When she walked in, the principal was staring at her and one of the faculty members pulled her over and told her that her skirt was too short and it was not appropriate. Tina was so upset because she felt she was scolded like a child, which also summed up her experiences of teaching at that particular school more generally.

Tina later left that school; however, these traditional social expectations and values about “good girls” are still deeply ingrained in her. Tina started to read many feminists’ works after being admitted to her doctoral program. For her, these works were eye opening: “I don’t know much about feminism. In the South, it is probably a curse word” (D1 L1102-1103). When these post-feminist values intersected with the neoliberal discourses about “good /successful girls,” a site of massive contradictions was created within Tina—she had to juggle between the traditional female role rooted in her cultural upbringing and at the same time re-adapt and reinvest in herself in order to fit into the neoliberal discourse about the autonomous and independent image of girls (Bain et al., 2017; Ringrose, 2007). For example, multiple times across the three interviews, Tina mentioned that she was and is struggling to fulfill her domestic duty such as raising her kids well and meet her husband’s needs. At the same time, she also needs to invest in her own education in order to be seen as a powerful woman and be respected by society. There are times she feels she is “crushed and burned.” However, she usually hides all of these feelings to herself

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because she doesn't want to be seen as weak; neither does she want to be judged by others (D1 L1091& L1111).

Identity, subjectivity and neoliberalism. As a matter of fact, embracing these neoliberal values and professing the skills required for such an environment is how Tina survives while making sense of her own experiences. Despite the apparent tensions among the many expectations of her female identity, and despite her evident frustration from her very first teaching experience, Tina got back to this later in her interview and suggested this was just a starting point for her to learn more about teacher mannerisms and how to be a professional in teaching. For me, it almost seems like “being professional” is her way of making a coherent self among the multiple “I’s” embedded not only in her female identity but also the many other struggles she has, as a result of the other identities she possesses within her context. Embracing some of these neoliberal ideologies might have made it easier for her to navigate the academic environment; however, they are also inevitably affecting Tina’s relationships with her colleagues and students when working as a GTA.

To start with, it seems like Tina and her professor had a caring, empowering, and authentic feminist mentorship, which seems to be in direct contrast with the traditional directive and hierarchical mentorship (Bain et al., 2017). Despite Tina’s positive description of her relationship with her mentor when she talked about her experiences, I still can’t help feeling that the relationship between the two is more complex than what Tina describes. As Tina later said in the interviews: “Teaching in college for someone else, for me, was more nerve-racking than if I had just been teaching on my own” (D1 L967-968). If her relationship with her professor was indeed as supportive and caring as she described, why would she still live in an anxious state? I

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believe one possible explanation is the amount of surveillance provided over her as a GTA by her professor as well as the accountability issues involved in her work.

While working as a GTA, Tina met with her professor and two other team members every week. From time to time, they were asked to bring three students' essays (A, B, and C-graded papers) to the meeting and show them to the professor. The purpose of this was to ensure that they all graded in the same way. However, such consistency is challenging to carry out in reality. Teachers face many obstacles when asked to align themselves and be consistent about their subjective interpretations of the same rubric, which is created based on the subjectivity of the creator of such a tool. Despite the obvious problem with this practice, for Tina, this never seemed to be an issue. Actually, Tina had mixed feelings towards this. On the one hand, she said: "I am glad she read them" (D1 L994). However, Tina was also worried. She was afraid that her students were not as good as the others, which may reflect poorly on her teaching: "I mean, like it'd be different if I had a really, really good one (paper). That's why I was so worried" (D1 L994-995).

Tina was afraid that the professor reading her comments might reveal Tina's incompetence that she felt she was hiding inside:

That's why I was so worried. I was like, 'What if my ratings are really, really bad?' ... I kept worried that I had said something I didn't realize I said that and they realize when I say something like horrible. ... So that was my fear that they were going to reveal something that I didn't remember doing (D1 L995-1000).

Hence, she was very cautious when commenting on her students' work:

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I didn't write many comments if we're being honest, I didn't write many comments because I didn't want to say something and someone reads it like 'but it doesn't sound true.' ... I was afraid to show my thinking, because someone else is going to read my comments. I am very worried the whole time" (D1 L1004-1009).

When compared to other aspects of her teaching, Tina was more worried about how the professor perceived her:

I was very worried that, that she wouldn't think I was a good teacher, she would not think I was intelligent. So for me, it was more so, I was just terrified, and I mean, I don't think she was thinking about those things at all. But I was, I was very worried. And even now, I am still worried like about my overall performance. I was like, well what if I hadn't quit? Will she hire me again? That's the truth. Would I have been hired again? Like did I do a good job? (D1 L1017-1021)

It seems like this "audit culture" she was in almost made her perform for her professor and become inauthentic to herself (Rinehart, 2016). The neoliberal "audit culture" focuses on measurement, which often leads to a distortion and devaluation of the very meaning of work (Murray, 2012). In Tina's case, her performance is measured both by her students' evaluations and the professor she works with. In the former, she is measured by visible guidelines set by her department about what good teaching should be. In the latter case, she is measured by the invisible standards held by her professor, or what Foucault refers to as the "technology of the self," which makes her alter her behaviors in order to "perform" for the professor she works with so that she can be seen as capable and responsible in order to be hired in the future.

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In the neoliberal audit culture, teachers must fit their teaching within certain parameters (often prescribed by those in power) that are more easily surveilled and audited in order to increase managerial efficiency (Rinehart, 2016). In Tina's case, mentoring becomes a powerful form of normalization of what's acceptable and hence a site of governmentality (Manathunga, 2007).

In terms of Tina's relationship with her colleagues, Tina said that they were able to collaborate, support, and share resources with each other in a non-competitive environment (D2 L792-801, 847). Once again, the story she shared later in the interview seems to contradict with what she suggested above.

During the weekly meeting, the three GTAs had to take turns sharing about their classes, and one of them was obviously struggling with her teaching when she relayed what happened in her class (D2 L983). The struggling GTA seemed perplexed when the three of them were talking in private (D2 L1139). The professor was kind to the GTA who struggled and never said anything bad about her teaching (D2 L987). However, what the struggling GTA did in these meetings somehow made Tina feel quite uneasy:

The person who's struggling speaks first, and then it went down. You know, so for me, it was only uncomfortable once someone started struggling. But before that, they were good. But once someone started struggling, they were very uncomfortable (D1 L893-865).

As a person who used to struggle with teaching and shared feelings in a similar context, it was a bit of shock for me to hear Tina's thoughts regarding the other GTA's performance. When I was a student teacher in China, I observed how teachers would sit down together and reflect on what went well in teaching and what did not. The elder/more experienced teacher showed a

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tremendous amount of understanding about the struggles of the new teachers and offered advice in terms of how to teach well, despite the competition the school system set up for the teachers. In China, the teachers with students who score the highest on national exams will earn monetary rewards. However, this didn't really stop them from being supportive of each other and sharing knowledge with each other. That is how I always felt things should be at those meetings.

Tina later explained that it made her really uncomfortable to see the concerns on her professor's face about the other GTA's class since her professor is such a nice person: "She didn't say it in front of us; she was very private about it. But I could see the concerns on her face and it made me say like: 'Oh, no!'" (D1 L880-881)

For me, I was curious about the reasons underlying Tina's response to the struggling GTA. Tina felt for the other GTA since she had been there when she first started to teach. However, it seems like Tina was uncomfortable about what the struggling GTA shared only when she saw her professor's concerned face. In other words, her emotional response to her colleague was mostly based upon her professor's response. I believe this is an example of how neoliberal ideologies have influenced teachers' relationships in education.

An ideal positive professional relationship should be one which fosters a sense of trust in learning communities so that teachers can collaborate with and support each other and empathize with and advocate for each other in difficult times (Acton & Glasgow, 2015), all of which will enhance teacher wellbeing. However, in this specific case, the performance technologies preferred by the one in power set indicators about what "good" teachers should be and diminished other qualities (Holloway & Brass, 2018) – good teachers should always stay positive and the negative emotions should be shunned. Moreover, under neoliberalism, the "technology

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of the self” requires individuals to actively adopt the technologies perpetuated by those in power in order to be valued and seen as responsible. This diminished a sense of community as well as collegiality; instead, it created a sense of competition among teachers. Hence, instead of trying to reflect upon and understand the many struggles and emotions new teachers may encounter and thus support each other in this regard, Tina chose to align her subjectivity with her professor’s so that she could more likely be valued when compared to her colleagues.

Lastly, neoliberal ideology changed Tina’s relationships with her students as well. On the one hand, Tina was extremely concerned about saying the wrong things to her students since she believed that her words would influence the next generation. However, on the other hand, for Tina, teaching almost becomes a “depersonalized process” (Murray, 2012) and she is only there to provide a service in order to satisfy her students’/customers’ demands:

I do feel like I’ve had a good day even if I had some students who were not paying attention because I know where they are coming from. For them, it’s “I pay you, of course you are going to teach,” but they don’t. But I have to still teach the same quality or they would be upset. So they expect my quality to always be the high quality no matter what their output is. I still need to give them high quality instruction, which is I guess frustrating but I don’t. It doesn’t frustrate me I guess because I am used to (it) (D2 L649-654).

Hence, there is an urge in Tina to present herself in a positive manner to impress her students who had little opportunity to interact with Black teachers. Furthermore, she is very aware of how race plays a part in students’ evaluation (D2 L1079). We all wanted to be

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evaluated well so that we might impress those in power and, hence, continue to be hired as GTAs for the next year.

Despite the visible contradictions in the stories Tina shared with me, in one of the interviews we had, Tina told me: “I think I had a great experience. ... I enjoyed it. I am not saying I did a great job. I am saying I enjoyed it. I don’t know if I did a good job. But I did enjoy it. I did enjoy it” (D1 L808-810). Tina’s accumulated experiences and self-reflection helped allow her to split her own judgments about good teaching, students’ needs, and professional teachers’ behaviors defined by those in power (Ball, 2003): “It is just part of the game. ... I realize part of the game but it is hard.” As Ball (2003) further explains, the term “game-playing” refers to compliance from teachers based upon the external standards that are imposed and that teachers will be judged on (p. 222).

Towards the end of the interview, Tina said that despite the many difficulties she faced, she still had a great experience while working as a GTA. She believes that being put in the right GTA position is imperative so that the chemistry among the team members is intentional and positive (D3 L428-L431). This comment has been lingering in my own head for a long time. It makes me wonder how work in an environment which endorses only a specific type of personality might endure. Diversity does not simply mean to have people of different colors working in the same space or to only value those who display certain personality traits. A true inclusive working environment should be able to accommodate the needs of people of different age, gender, social status, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, personality, ethnicity, and culture, etc. (Sharma, 2016).

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In the next part of the paper, I will move on to Maggie's story. She is the third female participant in this study. Similar to Tina, she is American born, but a white woman. Both women were from small towns near the religious belt. Before they started their doctoral studies, they both had many years of public school teaching experience. Moreover, they moved to Green City because of their husbands' jobs and they are both mothers of two children. As GTAs, they shared some common experiences. At the same time, there are some unique aspects to each of their stories as a result of their intersecting identities and specific contexts.

Maggie's Story

Maggie is a 34-year-old Caucasian female and the mother of two children. She grew up in a small town in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. She went to a small teaching college for her undergraduate studies and is certified in English and Social Studies Education, Grades 6-8. Maggie took an additional year to earn her Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the same college. After that, she taught for 10 years at a small public middle school. Before Maggie moved to Green City, her "entire life" was within a 15-mile radius of her parents' house. She met her husband while they were both in college, and they moved to Green City in July of 2018 for her husband's job. They bought an old house there, and while remodeling her new home, Maggie decided it was also time for her to go back to the university to get her doctoral degree. She was first admitted by T University as a Master's student in Fall 2018, since she missed the deadline for the doctoral program. After she got accepted, she explained her situation to the secretary of the department and reapplied for the doctoral program. At the time we spoke, she was already a Ph.D. student majoring in Education with a focus on Educational Theory and Practice.

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Maggie's first semester at T University was tough. She didn't know anyone, and she felt quite isolated (D1 L165). When Maggie was first admitted, she was not assigned an advisor, and she had to learn the boundaries and cultural norms of higher education all on her own. Things got better in the second semester when she was asked to work with a new faculty member of the education department in her area of expertise, Secondary Social Studies Education. However, it was also an exhausting semester for Maggie since she needed to work extra hours every week and there was almost no sleep: "I would pull 70 and 90 hour weeks almost every week. It was awful. It was bad" (D1 L199-200, 490). Her typical day that first semester started at 4:30 in the morning, then at 6:00 am her children woke up, and she got them ready for daycare. After she dropped them off, she usually worked in her office until 5:30 pm. After that, she had to pick up her kids and get them ready for dinner, a bath, and bedtime. Her house renovation started at around 11 p.m. (D1 L494-501). Her busy schedule made her feel guilty towards her children:

But we... the guilt is just am I doing enough to raise them? Am I sacrificing their childhood for me to be able to... like next semester, and that's the thing about this program that I don't like is I don't think they take into account people who have children. Because... all of the classes are offered at night. Which means next semester of the five days of the week, three of them, I have to be away from home. Yeah, my husband will take care of them and put them to bed. And then I get to come in and give them a kiss goodnight when they're already sleep. And there's so much guilt behind that. Like, am I abandoning them to do something successful for me? (D1 L506-513)

Maggie had to juggle multiple roles while working for her doctoral degree: she was a graduate student, a teacher, a researcher, a field supervisor, the mother of two young children, a house renovator, and a wife. Similar to Tina, Maggie put her role as a wife to the bottom of her

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list. However, the difference is that while Maggie's husband tried to be very supportive of her work, Tina's husband was deeply affected by her schedule: "I was really stressed, my marriage was in trouble. They all happen at the same time" (TD1 L1073). Meanwhile, Maggie seems to be much luckier since her husband would always step up and take things over to support her (D1 L201). Still, the multiple roles Maggie plays made her divide herself further, which led to great exhaustion (D1 L186-187).

Differences between teaching in public schools and higher education. Before Maggie started her doctoral studies, she had been a middle school teacher whose position offered a consistent income for her household. With this job, she could also spend her summer with her kids. Maggie had to take a considerable pay cut when she left her job for T University. For her, the free tuition, which comes with her GTA position, hardly seems like a benefit due to the amount of stress and financial loss she has to go through:

We, we took a huge chunk of pay cut, like we took a like a \$40,000 pay cut to come here.

Yeah. So well, for me, at least, he, he is separate, so he's essentially supplementing and making up for, kind of making up for where we lost, but.... So that was a huge, and anytime money is involved, it does get like a little stressful. Well, we're trying to eat, we have not leveled out. We are still about \$40,000 below where we were when we left.

Well, when I took this job, I knew it was going to be a smaller amount money. I mean, I knew I was going to make far less almost like a laughable amount to do this. But with the free tuition, it's hard to see that as a benefit because it's so stressful (D1 L229-236).

It is a shared understanding between her and one of her colleagues (another participant in this study, James) that teaching in the Education Department is so much different and more

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stressful compared to other departments since GTAs in the Education Department have to model what they are preaching:

But I think there's a difference, though, between teaching in the Education Department.

And just because James and I had this conversation 100 times, the expectation is so different. Because we are expected to, to almost like model what we're preaching.

Whereas in other fields, like James said: "Oh, I would just go in and just do math problems with them and that was it." And for us, it's like, we have to design like movement, and in thought provoking conversation, and, and, and facilitate group work.

And like, we have to really put together what it is we are asking them to do (D1 L591-596).

Moreover, for Maggie, while teaching at middle school, the relationships among teachers were close, and she missed the camaraderie among this group of teachers (D2 L611). In higher education, the relationships among professors and GTAs aren't equal due to the liminal identity GTAs possess – they are teachers and students at the same time, and a power imbalance is prevalent in teacher and student relationships (Jamieson & Thomas, 1974). As Maggie further explained: "I think for a student to faculty, it's, it's not supposed to be equal!" (D1 L779) Maggie continued suggesting that and the public space within her department also sends out implicit messages about this:

I think it's important that a graduate student who is a teaching assistant has a place that they can work, like have a not necessarily full office; I mean, I was really lucky to be able to, like snag that. But I think to have somewhere where they can put their stuff, put their name on their door, I realized that we are not equal to professors. But it offers a level of

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confidence to be able to, like put your name out on your door, have a key, I think that would be something that would be helpful (D2 L555-560).

But I am not dynamic enough! After Maggie was admitted to T Univeristy as a Master's student, she applied for a GTA position in the Education Department. She met the professor, Dr. Brown, who was in charge of hiring GTAs before the Fall semester started, and it was also Maggie's first day on campus. She described her first interaction with faculty at T University related to her interview experience: "The professor, he is nice, and he is kind, and 'life is great'... And then he is like, 'Well, we need an interview'" (D1 L852-854). After several weeks, Maggie finally had the interview and put it in her own words, "I had an atrocious, atrocious... interview. ... It was very toxic. I didn't get the job" (D1 L864).

The interview with Dr. Brown was supposed to be 30 minutes long, but it went on for two and a half hours instead. Reflecting upon this experience, Maggie said that she didn't really understand some of the questions which were asked, and the professor became very combative when she didn't address the questions adequately (D2 L156-157). Maggie became upset since she felt that the professor was trying to dismiss everything she said (D2 L159). She started to push back on Dr. Brown several times to defend her position: "So I feel like, yeah, because I know for me, when there have been professors that I did not see eye to eye with battle. And they recognize that. I didn't, and I didn't recognize that I shouldn't push back. I pushed back a little bit and that and not in a negative way. But I just defended myself. And I constantly see that person like in hallways and so it's weird, awkward" (D1 L782-786).

Maggie later explained that she wished that she hadn't pushed back on the professor because she still constantly sees him from time to time. Moreover, the fact that they both live in the same community also scares Maggie:

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But then once we moved in, and I knew he lives in our neighborhood, I was worried about that. Like, I was just worried he would look at my house, because we're remodeling it, we're doing a massive reconstruction, and there would be judgment (D2 L270-272).

In retrospect of the interview, Maggie defended her behavior by saying that she wished the professor knew it was the way of how he interact with her that caused her to respond in such a defensive manner.

Maggie said the professor told her that although she described herself as an active and influential teacher with the words she chose, she didn't sound like one with the ways in which she used those words. "He told me that I was a terrible teacher" (D1 L1052). For Maggie, the criticism of the professor towards her was unfair because she was very devoted to her work and she took lots of pride in her work: "I'm really sorry that interview went the way it was because I don't think you've got an idea of who I am" (D1 L1117-1118).

Later on, when the professor asked her how she could tell if someone is a quality teacher versus someone who is not going to be successful in the teaching world, Maggie spoke her mind by saying that teachers are natural-born. "And he (the professor) threw a big red flag" (D1 L873). By this, Maggie meant that saying that teachers are "natural born" was the wrong answer, which marked her as uninformed. Maggie was quite confused. "And I was like, 'But that is not true?'" (D1 L873) Following the response made by Maggie, the professor gave her a lecture on this topic and from Maggie's perspective, he "ripped me open" (D1 L878).

Through the interview, Maggie also sensed disparities between her and the professor in terms of how they interpreted the realities of classrooms. Maggie was asked which theorists and literature she had researched before the interview, and she felt that she fell short on this aspect. "I

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have a kid who hasn't eaten in three days (when I taught in Virginia). That's more important than going and finding out what, you know, they, what all the theories say about how the kids gonna learn" (D1 L1066-1067). After she finished the interview, Maggie said, "I am not gonna play this game" (D1 L1080-1081). By "not playing the game" Maggie meant that she would not comply with the external implicit standards the professor imposed upon her about what good teachers should be.

For Maggie, this interview was like a "beat-up session," and she took a day off work afterward to recover. The remarks made by the professor in her first job interview at T University haunted her and caused many self-doubts inside of her later when she obtained a different teaching position at the same institution, one not supervised by Dr. Brown. Even months later, as we spoke, she said she still suffered from "what feels like PTSD" (D1 L968) from the situation. She would find herself crying randomly in the grocery store even a few weeks after the interview:

I mean, it was a good two weeks or so that I really would find myself crying over how it, how it played out randomly. Me in a grocery store started crying. And I hear somebody say something, and I would just go, "But I'm not good enough." So, but it, it took me, I cried right afterwards for like, six straight hours. And I was exhausted. I didn't eat. But yeah, it took a long time to... (D2 L279-283).

Maggie was miserable on her way driving home from Green City. When Maggie went back to her middle school students, she kept questioning in her head, "Am I not a quality teacher?" (D1 L1083)

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After the awful interview she kept wondering if it gave the professor a sense of gratification for breaking people down:

I kind of sat back and thought, “Is he breaking people down so he can build up what he wants? Like, is he trying to break you down to build up what he wanted you to be?

Where did it give him gratification for breaking you down?” ...Because I know that just from my brief encounter, that that's something that would have... I couldn't have done it (D1 L928-932).

I was set up to fail. Maggie googled the professor when she got home, just to make herself feel that she was not alone. The results made her feel devastated, and she found out that from the perspective of an outsider, the professor seemed like the “golden child” of the department who has been awarded many titles and crowned with glory: “How the hell is he winning these awards for being amazing?” (D1 L936-937) The professor is known for advocating for and validating students of color (D1 L1009). All of which made her question herself, “What is wrong with me?” (D2 L24)

About three weeks before school started, the secretary of her department called her and asked if she would like to teach a few classes, which came with benefits including free tuition, free insurance coverage, and free parking (D1 L25-26). She hesitated at first since, after her first interview, her plan was to take out student loans so that she could focus on her school work, her kids, and the renovations of her new house. She was also concerned about teaching on the first day of her doctoral study since the last time she was in a college classroom was a decade ago, while she was studying for her Master’s degree. Most importantly, she was in doubt of her own teaching ability after her first interview, “How am I going to do this when this man told me that I

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wouldn't be successful at it?" (D1 L879) "How am I supposed to do this with this man hovering, knowing that he's lurking in the shadows to watch me fail?" (D1 L1091)

For Maggie, she was intimidated and miserable during the first semester of her doctoral studies. She came in with little knowledge about the systems and all the resources available for students (D3 L231-232). She was frightened on her first day of coming back to campus and teaching at the college level. Despite her previous middle school teaching experience, she had no idea about what she was doing: "But it was hard because I had to kind of make up the content. As I went, there's no textbook" (D1 L52-53).

Standing in the front of a stadium seated with 46 students, when compared to the other professors who already have a degree and experiences of teaching in higher education, Maggie felt that: "It's almost like you're setting someone up to fail" (D1 L652) since she "came in with nothing" (D1 L644-652). She felt she just "didn't fit into her environment" (D3 L246).

It was also during her first semester, in one of her classes, that she suddenly stopped teaching in the middle of her class because of all the confused undergraduate faces. Maggie told her students, "I don't want to bury you all any further. You are confused. I am confused. Can we come back to this next week?" (D1 L672-673) To her surprise, her students responded to her suggestion quite positively. "They were like, 'You realize that no professors ever do that? They just push ahead, even if we are confused?'" (D1 L674-675) Her students' comments shocked Maggie. She said,

Like really? Like no one stops to, to become human? I was like, "Whoa, that is insane."

Like it is insane to me that no one would stop and go, "Okay, I will own that, I botched

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that. Let's come back to it next week." So if there's a human piece that almost feels like it's removed, but anyways...(D1 L672-677).

Maggie let the students out of the classroom early afterward. "We will still be confused, but we will be happier because we are out early" (D1 L682). As a GTA, I also did the same thing in the past occasionally, with many fears of being seen as "unprofessional." No one explained explicitly to me what it meant to be professional, yet the implicit codes of conduct that I have accumulated over the years have led to many internal debates about whether it is acceptable to do such a thing. In other words, it is a debate between whether I want to be a human being or be a technician who sets feelings and emotions aside of teaching.

Tough love? Despite the many obstacles she faced as a new teacher in higher education, Maggie was determined to "make it work," mostly because of the remarks the professor, Dr. Brown, made to her during her first interview. "I can't fail! I have to kick ass at this! ... I think this has a lot more meaning behind it now!" (D1 L1091-1093) She seemed desperate to prove to herself that she was not what Dr. Brown thought she was (D3 L451). Her desire to prove herself was rooted in her learning disability and her struggle to disown the label given to her by others, which is also one of the reasons why she decided to continue her doctoral study (D3 L468). She was also struggling with self-doubts the entire time. When students came to her and told her that she was their favorite teacher, instead of accepting the compliments, Maggie thought to herself, "But I am not dynamic enough!" (D1 L41) That was the exact phrase Dr. Brown had used in the interview:

I am not dynamic apparently. "I'm not as dynamic as this person." That was the word. I remember, I was like, "What is the word to use? It is 'dynamic'! You described yourself as a 'dynamic teacher'" (D2 L41-43).

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While relaying her story, Maggie repeatedly used Dr. Brown's the word of "dynamic." The deliberate repetition of some items in a text may be due to the fact that the speaker wants to put special emphasis on something so as to create a special effect in the audiences' mind (Behnam & Mahmoudy, 2013). In this specific case, with the repetitive use of the same word, I wonder if Maggie wanted to show how she was deeply influenced by the remarks from the professor.

I had a hard time analyzing this part of the interview since I personally knew Dr. Brown. From my perspective, he is very smart and devoted to his work; he is well-loved as well as respected by his students. He is an advocate for students and colleagues of color and very passionate in helping them when they are in need. However, I feel deeply for Maggie since I personally also experienced many episodes of mental breaks down when working with him. Maggie's stories reminded me of the days when the tiniest thing would trigger me to cry for hours because of the amount of pressure I experienced. Similar to Maggie, I also kept thinking to myself that there must be something wrong with me. Otherwise, why was I unable to work with such a beloved professor? Sometimes, I wondered if Dr. Brown intentionally used so-called "tough love" to force us to become better versions of ourselves. However, I couldn't convince myself with this explanation because of how selective this "love" seemed to be. As I delved into the educational literature related to students, teachers, and power, I keep wondering if the phenomenon of bullying in neoliberal universities could be used to explain what Maggie and I both experienced with this professor.

Bullying is a type of aggression directed toward a person who is not able to defend him/herself (Hjelt-Back, Birkqvist, & Osterman, 1994). The power asymmetry between the bully and the target is the foundation of such a relation, and control held by the bully is ubiquitous as

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well as impenetrable (Zabrodska, Linnell, Laws, & Davies, 2011). Moreover, the neoliberal discourse fosters the narrative that one will have many jobs in their lifetime, and he/she can always leave when bullying happens in academic settings (Zabrodska et al., 2011). This makes GTAs more vulnerable to neoliberal bullying since they cannot afford to leave their positions for financial reasons. As a consequence, they have to continue to be the target of academic bullying. Maggie's emotional responses to this experience later on coincided with the affective consequences of being bullied – that it threatens one's status as a viable subject, and hence one usually displays a strong desire to be recognized by others (see discussion below) as a legitimate or competent member of academe (Zabrodska et al., 2011).

Suggestions for self-care. When asked how to deal with these stresses, Maggie said that being associated with certain materials in her working space and receiving recognitions from her colleagues are some of the ways she overcomes work-related stress (D3 L246-247). For instance, having her own work space (a formal office in the department) and the key to it give her a sense of belonging. Maggie also had specific self-coping strategies that she used to support herself. She used lots of self-talk when she was in doubt of herself. There was one time when she sat in the classroom and listened to how the other people were working on their dissertations, and it intimidated her since it was only her first semester in the doctoral program. When doubts emerged, Maggie engaged in self-talk to boost up her own confidence and justify her presence: “I just had to really check myself a lot. ... I belong here just as much as they do. Maybe I don't understand the terminology yet; maybe academically, I am not, I might not be as smart as them. But the talents that I have in the classroom may not transition to the talents that they have. ... They may have book smarts, but I can teach” (D3 L260-262). Not only does Maggie try to lift herself out of her doubt, but she also actively helps one of her colleagues with this. Her colleague

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had constant self-doubts about himself for lacking teaching experience while working in the Education Department. “He deserves to be there just if not more than anybody else” (D3 L270-271). Lastly, in order to stay positive, Maggie was also trying to be very purposive in terms of whom she chose to interact within her department. “The people at this department are lovely. The ones that I choose to interact with; the ones I choose interact with” (D3 L378). In order to find a supportive network, Maggie further suggested that it is crucial to not be afraid of asking for help. She suggested that one must be willing to introduce herself and try to get acquainted with everyone in the department.

A comparison of Maggie and Tina’s stories. When I was analyzing Maggie’s interview, I could not help but to keep going back to Tina’s stories since there are so many similarities that exist in their experiences. To start with, they are approximately the same age, and they were both raised in small towns near the religious belt. Besides, they both worked for the public school system for years before they returned to their doctoral studies. In terms of their domestic lives, they both have two kids and moved to Green City for their husband’s job. It seems that race and their families’ socio-economic backgrounds are the only main differences that exist between them. Maggie was White and raised in an upper middle class family. Her father is a civil engineer who owns his own company. However, Tina is Black, and she came from a poor household. Her parents sometimes ask her for money.

However, beyond the similarities of being wives and mothers from rural contexts as well as female GTAs in education exist some deeper connections, which I believe are shaped by the neoliberal ideologies they are surrounded with. These ideologies direct them to govern themselves in specific ways. These are their beliefs in the discourses of professionalism, their

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struggles with the discourse of “preparedness,” and their battles of meeting the expectations of the images of women in the neoliberal age.

To start with, in both Tina’s and Maggie’s story, they shared a strong desire to “be professional,” which actually has little to do with teacher ethics, but rather to obey the powerful means of controlling of the teacher group (Osgood, 2006). For Tina, this desire is layered with multiple factors such as her race, her educational background, and her eagerness to fit in so that she can be hired by her department in the future. However, for Maggie, she was concerned with having a career, yet also physically being here because she now had finished a home renovation for her family, and she wanted them to be able to breathe and enjoy it for a while:

My level of needing to be professional also kind of plays into wanting to stay here. So like, I am doing what they are asking and I am pushing things. I’m doing the professional side because I want them to hire me. I need to stay here because you know, yeah, I’ve put way too much time into this house to be able to sell it right away (D1 L716).

Later in their interviews, both Maggie and Tina mentioned the term “checking boxes” which seems to be a way to show their understanding of what it meant to be professional – to govern themselves in the most desired way by those in power without any resistance:

And so to me, that's the way that I feel both boxes, I check off the boxes if students are happy, and if they're learning and if they're getting what they expected out of the course, where they wanted to end up the course. And then it'll check the boxes. It'll eventually trickle to them. And then it'll eventually trickle to administration. And hopefully I'll get a job. I don't know (Maggie, MD3 L518-522).

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I felt good, but you know, like you said before in confidentiality, there's a “golden child,” not me. There's someone who's doing it and it is not me, it is XX. You know, someone who's checking the boxes, and every now and again, they miss a box, that's me. (Tina, TD1 L859-861)

The intentions of both of them were the same – by becoming “technicians of behaviors” whose task is to produce “bodies that are docile and capable” (Foucault, 1979, as cited in Ball, 2003), they can be seen as more employable by those in power. As Osgood (2006) pointed out, this dominant discourse about professionalism is nothing but a powerful way to communicate with and socialize the workers with the desired practice of a profession so that they can be positioned as certain types of people (p. 190). From this perspective, “teacher professionalism” is nothing but a subtle—yet powerful—way of controlling this occupational group. It forces them to perform a given policy intention regardless of whether they believe in it or not (Osgood, 2006).

Moreover, their struggles with the “preparedness” discourse are also prevailing in both of their stories. To begin with, for Maggie, it seems like the “preparedness” discourse has dominated the graduate students’ orientation held by her university. It was suggested to Maggie that graduate students should find out what they want to do early so that they can craft everything they do towards their research agenda. This “readiness” discourse only causes more stress inside of her since when she first started, she had no clue about what she wanted to do, and she felt she has been wasting her time due to her cluelessness. She also questions the prevailing discourse of “preparedness”: “I think it is impossible to buckle yourself down early” (D1 L579). The same theme can also be seen in Tina’s story.

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As their stories unfold, both Maggie and Tina shared that they had little background in education theory since the colleges they went to were small, and there was no research track. They both mentioned that the first time they read a research paper was when they started their doctoral studies. As a result, they both felt that they were underprepared for their current academic settings.

For Maggie, she felt quite uneasy when she was sitting through her first in-person doctoral-level class: “I have English my entire life; I have very little French background, that is all. I sat there going, “What are they saying?’ I have no idea what they are saying. What is this language (that I am reading in these theoretical texts)?” I felt so out of place, a fish out of water (D1 L130-131).

Tina also shared a similar feeling towards academic language. She was very aware of her Southern accent, and she was living in constant pressure of making herself say the right things so that she would sound smart in front of her colleagues (TD1 L634-367). The difference is that Tina buried all these feelings, and she was afraid of asking for any external help. However, Maggie was quite open about her feeling towards her colleagues:

And luckily, being at the position that I am at the university, I can go to other people and say like, “Is this a normal feeling?” You know, “You are fine, just give it time. You got to learn; you have to give yourself time” (D1 L141-142).

The neoliberal discourse requires individuals to reposition themselves to be seen as autonomous agents in order to align with its market agenda. Kloet and Aspenlieder (2013) further argue that in higher education, graduate student training sometimes enacts this logic of neoliberalism which aims at producing “self-actualizing graduate students” who need to act in

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specific ways in order to be seen as responsible and capable of navigating in an increasingly academic market (p. 286).

Lastly, similar to Tina, Maggie was also raised in a small town near the religious belt and struggled between meeting the expectations of the new female image perpetuated by the neoliberal culture and performing the traditional gender expectations in domestic life. At times, the discourse about the traditional female role played into her questioning and guilt about their roles as mothers: “The guilt is, just, am I doing enough to raise them? Am I sacrificing their childhood for me?” (D1 L506-507) Maggie further explained that most of the classes offered by her program are at night, which means she is away from her kids three nights a week. When she arrives home, they are already in bed. That is one of the moments when she suffers from the feeling of deepening guilt over leaving the kids at home: “There is so much guilt behind that, like, ‘Am I abandoning them to do something successful for me?’” (D1 L512-513)

The neoliberal discourse emphasizing that hard work is needed to attain educational and career success is seen in both Maggie’s and Tina’s stories. This type of “new girl” possesses both feminine and masculine qualities at the same time, which creates a site of massive contradistinctions for both Maggie and Tina (Ringrose, 2007). When this discourse intersects with motherhood, female GTAs’ experiences become more complex (Anaya, 2011). As seen in both of their stories, another layer of guilt prevails.

In the next part of the chapter, I move on to James’ story. He shares a similar background with Maggie – they are both white with middle class, religious and communally oriented. However, the approaches they chose to narrate their stories are quite different, with Maggie

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focused on a personal-relational perspective and James taking up a more structural approach, which I believe could be the result of their gender differences.

James' Story

James is a 33-year-old white male, who is a second-year Ph.D. student majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus on Math Education in the Education Department at T University. Before his doctoral studies, he earned two Master's degrees consecutively from Northern Hills College. One of them is an M.S. in Mathematics, and the other one is an MST (Master of Science in Teaching), focusing on Math Education. It was also in the same college that James earned two Bachelor's degrees; one is in Music, and the other in Mathematics. James' decision to study math was influenced by his twin brother, who was also a math major back then.

James is from the Northeastern Region of the United States. His family was Baptist, and he was homeschooled starting in seventh grade until he entered college. His parents were not comfortable with him studying subjects such as Science and Music in public school, and ironically, these are what James and his brother majored in later in their university studies.

After completing his Master's degrees, James was admitted by the doctoral program in the Department of Mathematics at T University. Multiple universities actually accepted him for his doctoral study, including some of the top ones in Math/Math Education in the country. Yet, he made his decision to study at T University mostly due to the low cost of living in this region. He was uncertain if he could survive solely on the stipend given by the other universities, which are located in areas with high living costs, and he was against taking out any student loans. However, things didn't work out as planned for James in the Math Department, after two years of studying there. Despite his love for pure math as well as the mathematical proof process, he

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found that his doctoral studies became extremely challenging. That was when he turned to Mathematics Education in the Education Department, which allowed him to study how other people think about the experience of mathematical proofs. As we spoke, it was the end of his second year as a Ph.D. student in the Education Department, and he planned to graduate in two more years.

From a small liberal arts college to an R1 university. After he graduates, an ideal place for James to teach is a small liberal college similar to Northern Hills College, where he had the most pleasant and potent academic experience. He enjoyed working in a small college when compared it to a large educational institution such as T University. He believes that R1 universities tend to have more expectations placed on both faculty members and students; hence, it is more stressful for them when compared to a small liberal arts college.

It was a big adjustment for James moving from Northern Hills College to T University as well as later transferring from the Math Department to the Education Department within the same university. Although James' Master's classes at Northern Hills College were quite challenging and stressful, he still felt he was able to connect with the others well. All the TAs shared one big office, and through this public space, they were able to talk about graduate school life; hence, they created a sense of community (D3 L34 & L86). It seemed like the TAs quite enjoyed the company of each other back then since there was lots of joking. When they had spare time, they sat down to watch cartoons together. Reflecting upon this experience, James said that was the easiest, yet the most productive time he ever had in graduate school (D1 L114, & 119). Meanwhile, the classes in the Math Department at T University focused more on cramming as much information into the curriculum as possible – it seems like this university values quantity over quality when compared to the Math Department at Northern Hills College: “Another thing

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related to that is that they (T University) tried to push more content into the semester than Northern Hills College. So Northern Hills College was more about quality over quantity, whereas T University is more on the side of quantity over quality. “Yeah, that was a challenge. It was tough!” (D3 L217-220)

The neoliberal college is tightly coupled with the idea of “excellence” and the embedded assumption of which is the material practices associated with the performances of excellence (D. B. Saunders, 2015). Hence, a simple logic would be that the more classes a college can offer, the better it will be. Moreover, although it defies the logic of an R1 institution, teaching extra courses is what faculty members need to possess in order to justify their salaries (Hamilton, 2011).

It is worth mentioning here that T University just recently became an R1 institution while Northern Hills College, while focused mostly on liberal arts, is still an R2 institution. R1 and R2 are categories the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education uses to indicate universities in the United States that engage in the high levels of research activity (“Research I university,” 2020). Research expenditures, in both scientific and nonscientific fields, are crucial metrics for the Carnegie rankings (Dodds, 2019). For instance, one of the criteria for R1 institutions is that they must have at least \$5 million in research expenditures (“Basic classification description,” n.d.).

An R1 label can help burnish a school’s reputation and hence make universities stand out and, as the president of T University suggested, the R1 label helps to recruit and retain faculty members as well as increase the quality of the student body (Anderson, 2016). The purpose of this is to secure one’s place in the highly competitive neoliberal research landscape (J. Trent,

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2019). In neoliberal institutions, students are viewed as customers, and faculty members are like service providers (Giroux, 2002). It seems like one way to make the students feel that their money is well spent is through a crammed curriculum.

When things didn't work out as planned in the Math Department, James transferred to the Education Department, where he also found he had a hard time adjusting. To begin with, the workload in the Education Department is much larger, and one has to be continuously engaged. At the same time, in the Math Department, everything was quite condensed, and he had more (perceived) spare time while studying in the Math Department. Moreover, James felt isolated since the Education Department has fewer people "who are mathematically minded" (D1 L403). Lastly, James also felt that it was hard for him to fit into the environment of the Education Department since he had little prior teaching experiences in public schools in general (D1 L285).

The neoliberal institution and its impact on individuals. As a student, when reflecting upon his learning experiences in the two types of environments, James mentioned that he enjoyed both of his experiences. However, he truly appreciated his time at Northern Hills College since it is a smaller college where everyone is quite supportive, and it is easier to foster a love of learning in all students. Besides, students had more opportunities to explore what they wanted to do instead of being simply thrown at things arbitrarily. Meanwhile, in R1 institutions such as T University, it seems like professors get aggravated and annoyed quite easily when the students cannot conform or meet their expectations about what a good scholar should be, which could be the result of the stress level that professors have to bear when compared to smaller, regional colleges:

I don't want to put too many words in their mouths. But it just seems like someone was.

So that small, small group of professors. It's like they just didn't realize, I don't know if

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they took the time to think, you know, how they were coming off. Because I've had a lot of great professors that also pushed me. And it was uncomfortable, but you always knew that it was because they were trying to help you in the end. And it was very clear. And so those were really great experiences, but, but this professor is the kind of people just talking about, are more just like, "Oh, they were annoyed," and they're just kind of venting, didn't feel productive at all (D3 L364-370).

James suggests that the level of stress people experience at R1 institutions "kind of trickles down to all aspects, including relationships" (D2 L163) among the people who work for those organizations. James further explains that to earn the trust of each other, one has to be careful in terms of how he/she presents him/herself, and also be willing to show vulnerability which is an essential component of a productive working environment:

I think it's, some of it is trust, because I think there is, there can be a spirit of competitiveness between graduate students sometimes. And I think especially at, like I noticed that got stronger when I came here, at T University. Just because you have to be, I mean, since it is a more competitive institution. And so I think that kind of trickles down to all aspects, including relationships. And so I think part of it is you've got a, if you're going to connect with people, like you've gotta be careful what you say, and just be careful not to come off as like, like you're trying to compete, because that doesn't earn their trust at all. So I think the three of us, we, we, we gained each other's trust by just being, we're just nice to each other. And you know, and so that... so that, yeah, trust is the big thing. And same with Maggie. Like, there was no competition or anything. And so like, yeah, I think, I think, yeah, it's the building that level of trust, and like just being okay with being wrong and stuff like that. And, you know, if you're struggling, don't

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worry, you know how you look in front of it. And I think if you show that actively, that's what kind of builds the trust and that they'll reciprocate that regard. So it was I think that's a big reason for that. So I got lucky in that, you know, including you and others, like we just trust each other. And, and I think it's because we're honest, and then up front, and you know, we're not afraid to like, hide our mistakes and stuff. So, I think that's really important. And that's what makes it the most productive (D2 L160-174).

In the field of higher education, there are numerous claims made about neoliberal ideology and how the neoliberal principles have infiltrated the behaviors of faculty members and shaped their professional work (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015). Neoliberal ideology has led to a denial of the interdependency of human beings and failed to recognize the vulnerability as well as the neediness of individuals; instead, the pursuit of “self-interest” has not only been normalized but also legitimized in neoliberal educational institutions (Lynch, 2010). In R1 institutions, such as T University, professors whose research agenda can contribute to institutional prestige and reputation are highly valued. Hence their neglect of care in social relations becomes quite understandable within the neoliberal educational contexts (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015).

A comparison of different teaching experiences in two types of education environment. While he was studying for his Master’s degree at Northern Hills College, James worked as a GTA in the Math Department for five years. After he started his doctoral program in the Math Department at T University, he was able to continue work as a GTA for two years. For the first three semesters, his job was to teach lower-level calculus recitation to undergraduate students. For the fourth semester, he worked as a lecturer who taught a calculus related course. He met with his students twice a week. Besides, he also had weekly meetings with the program coordinator, in which they were able to talk about what was going on in their classes. James later

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mentioned that people in the Math Department were more aware that graduate students were teachers in training, and it seems like there wasn't as much expectation of teaching when compared to the Education Department (D3 L334). Hence, as a TA, he felt safer to share his teaching in a judgment free environment when he worked for the Math Department (D1 L266). However, teaching in the Math Department was almost prescriptive when compared to the Education Department as well as Northern Hills College, where classes were less coordinated, and teachers were given more autonomy over their teaching:

Here at T University, they have what are called coordinated; we should call it like class, coordinated classes. So like calculus here, it's like a program where all the calculus instructors, I did engineering calculus, and so all the engineering calculus instructors would get together every week, and they would all do the same thing, they would all have to be on the same page. That was not the case at Northern Hills College, we didn't have to coordinate with other instructors, each instructor had their own say. And I'm sure that they had to meet some sort of minimum amount of topics. But it, that's one reason why it felt less stressful is that each instructor had basically full control over the class, was not the case here. So that's the biggest difference that I had to get used to that. And again, it kind of goes in with Northern Hills College be very relaxed. And like it doesn't surprise me the differences there. In terms of Education Department here, I guess just speaking.... So here it was even more stressful, because not only it was a coordinated, just like it was in the Math Department here. But again, they had that component of you had to do high quality teaching. I don't think you had as much of that expectation. I mean, they wanted it, but you didn't have to have. So that just added more to the stress, but also more to my personal growth (D2 L636-649).

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While studying in the Education Department, James worked as a Research Assistant for two years. His only teaching experience was through the course Teaching Practicum, which is required for the completion of his degree. For this course, he was observing most of the time (D3 L396-397), and he only taught a small portion of each class (between 10 – 15 minutes). He also subbed for the professor three times during the semester when he was unable to teach in person. James felt that the most significant difference in teaching in the Education Department was the amount of interaction between the professor and the students during the class: "... (The professor) was not just talking at them, which is what the Math Department kind of stuff would be more like, but you are asking questions in a way that is, that is going to spur their thinking" (D3 L396-399). The emphasis on personal connections in the Education Department is something that James had little awareness of before when teaching in the Math Department.

As James further explained in his interview, teaching in the Education Department is more active and student centered when compared to education in the Mathematics Department. Professors from the former are more concerned with using the right kind of teaching tactics (D1 L296) to engage the students continuously throughout the class. His teaching practicum experience opened his mind to what active learning is (D1 L323).

Reflecting upon his teaching experiences, James mentioned that teaching in the Education Department is more challenging when compared to teaching in the Math Department. While working as a GTA in the latter, James said he was not quite concerned about his evaluation since as long as they show up for the class, they are not going to get into trouble (D1 L233-235). It is interesting to note here that, in Tina's and Maggie's stories, they both mentioned that they scrutinize students' evaluations as a way to validate their teaching abilities, which may help them to be hired again by the department in the future.

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I believe the underlying reasons that these teaching evaluations are so important for Tina and Maggie are multi-layered. To start with, students' evaluations can produce gendered outcomes for teachers (Laube, Massoni, Sprague, & Ferber, 2007). For instance, a large study conducted by Bennett (1982) found that female instructors are subject to culturally conditioned gender stereotypes, and they usually are perceived as warmer and more potent individuals. However, they are often required by the students to offer greater interpersonal support and are judged more closely than their male colleagues.

Female instructors' experiences become more complicated when gender intersects with race. For instance, Basow, Codos, and Martin (2013) found out that students tend to evaluate white professors more highly than African American professors and the same also applies to male versus female professors. Moreover, the audit-driven culture (Rinehart, 2016) in neoliberal educational institutions may also be adopted to understand the different behaviors of male and female GTAs since in some higher education institutions, such as American University, the decision of hiring is made based on GTAs' student evaluations ("GuideLs for duties and evaluation of graduate assistants," n.d.). There is no doubt that students' evaluation results will have a higher impact on female GTAs when compared to the males since they are evaluated based on the same criteria, which ignores how biased such evaluation can be towards race and gender. These reasons might account for female GTAs' behavior of scrutinizing their students' evaluations.

Besides, when analyzing James' story, I feel that he has a more structural critique of his own experiences. In contrast, the other three female participants' stories are more about domestic life and personal conflicts, which may be another result of gender difference. For instance, Maines (1996) suggests that starting at a young age, males configure themselves through

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storytelling as individuals, and they drew more attention to themselves when telling stories.

Females, on the other hand, configure themselves through storytelling as social beings, which are necessary conditions for future collaborations. A similar pattern can also be seen from the study conducted on adolescents about their visions of the future (Greene & Wheatley, 1992). The researchers found that female adolescents' narratives are more about the family domain such as marriage and parenthood. In the meantime, male participants' stories focus more on their life courses. These gendered differences may be employed to explain the different approaches of storytelling among the participants of this study.

The “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” mentality. The social-economic context of Green City is quite similar to the one James grew up in – they are both rural, religious, and poverty-stricken (D1 L519, D2 L22). Still, when James first moved to Green City, he found that there was a significant mismatch between him and the others from this region. To start with, it is the “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” (D1 L511) attitude that people at T University hold that made James feel uncomfortable, which was quite different from the chill and communal atmosphere that he was used to (D2 L26): “Baptists love having dinners and stuff like that” (D2 L29-30). While he was studying at Northern Hills College, he made lots of friends with the other GTAs through the church they attended weekly, and they were able to support each other (D2 L37). Hence, it was quite natural for him to feel a sense of connection with the others back then.

While studying at T University, James found that the atmosphere was quite competitive, and people seldom had the freedom to hang out with each other since the large workloads people have stressed them out already. The intensified workloads at T University also add a layer to the isolated feelings that James already had to bear. He wonders if this is a result of the

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cultural/political differences between the two regions, or the results of different academic and research orientations of the two institutions (R1 vs. R2).

When he was working at Northern Hills College, due to the small size of the classes and the programs he was in, it was easier to develop personal connections with each other (D1 L571-572): “At Northern Hills College, because people were so laid back, it’s almost like the support system was like, just built into it” (D3 L808-809). He felt he was quite isolated when working in the Education Department since there were fewer people who share common research experiences.

James also felt that there is a mismatch between his personality and the types of personalities which are desired in the neoliberal academic environment. To start with, James has a natural tendency to worry about things (D1 L453). He found himself constantly asking the question: “Am I doing enough?” and he felt guilty when taking a break in between his work (D1 L467). Besides, James also found that he had dealt with a share of people who were difficult to get along with while studying at T University when compared to his time at Northern Hills College. For instance, he felt that at T University, there are more people who are smart, highly competitive, and at the same time, condescending towards others, especially when they sense the other people are holding them back (D3 L223-245).

Moreover, James also found that some discourses which circulate in higher education can be quite contradictory with one another. For example, efficiency and excellence are two qualities emphasized in the neoliberal working environment (Giroux, 2002). In higher education, the first characteristic is usually displayed by the multiple roles that faculty members have to juggle – researchers, teachers, mentors, administrators, etc. They also have to always be on the move to

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push for the next project/article, and to show their employability to the market. However, for James, in order for him to produce something really strong, it took him a lot of time (Mountz et al., 2015), which created a site of struggle within him. He put this into words: “I’m the weakest, this is like speed, I definitely get that pressure that they want that and just because that is the thing I struggle with” (D3 L278-279).

Lastly, the topic of publication has been circulating around the three interviews I had with James. It is a skill, as James believes, that is required by the job market. Despite how much he enjoyed his coursework at T University, James believed that when students have to take many credits, they get distracted and they can’t get as many publications as required by the job market – which fits well with the popular saying of “publish or perish” in higher education (Jafar, 2012). In the meantime, Master’s students at Northern Hills College were almost forced into research immediately after they started their education (D3 L444). This is quite an interesting phenomenon since graduate students are expected to produce more publications in R1 institutions when compared to other types of institutions.

Neoliberalism in education is producing new kinds of teaching subjects and new forms of subjectivity which, in turn, created sites of struggle and resistance within each individual (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). As Ball and Olmedo (2013) continue to point out, individuals can resist these neoliberal ideologies by acting “irresponsive” so that they can be responsible for the care of themselves, hence creating the possibility of thinking about education and themselves differently (p. 85).

Suggestions for self-care and change. Towards the end of the interview, James provided suggestions of self-care practices for his fellow colleagues in terms of how to resist and protect

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oneself from the dominant discourses of the neoliberal institutions. Reflecting upon his experience as a doctoral student, James said that it is normal for graduate students to feel stressed at first and there is no way around it:

Okay, um, it's going to be really stressful at first, like, there's no way around it. And you're going to feel really bad. Because there's only so many times where you're going to be like, I didn't do pull this class off very well. And, and I guess just like, it's normal. It's all, everything you're going through, you're going to look back two years, and say how much, you've realized how much you've improved since then, but then also realize that everyone's struggling in the same way (D3 L474-478).

However, it is equally important to engage in the practice of self-care, such as taking a day off every week to rest one's mind (D1 L410-412). It seems like shielding off external pressures is also a skill that graduate students have to learn in order to not be stressed out. For instance, James mentioned that there are many external pressures pressing him to graduate soon. However, he believes that it won't work for him to do so and he chooses to do what he believes is the best for himself despite the external voices:

And I think that might have been key for me is, I didn't want that pressure to just graduate and get everything done with as soon as possible gets me. Because I knew that wasn't going to work for me, because I wasn't, I didn't, and I still to this day struggle with just like, do a lot of good stuff in a short amount of time. So I think kind of, I just kind of thought about me, I think a lot and not caring that it's taken me this long. And I don't know what other people think. But I don't think I regret it. Because I was able to get to the point where I am now without beating myself up, tear much I guess and, and enjoying the same time. Because I think if I just rushed through everything.... So I'm glad that I

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went through and wanted to learn how to improve and didn't just want to just graduate really quickly. I think that's another big thing. So while I can't wait to be done, I'm doing the best I can to go at the pace that is right for me (D2 L636-649).

Besides, having family support and finding a group of fellow TAs to get support are also important in terms of dealing with the stress of graduate school: "I call my family, often. And my brother, who was also a graduate student now, a faculty member, like, we like, like, I definitely talked to each other. And that is a good form of something therapeutic about it" (D1 L420-422). Lastly, graduate students should not be afraid of articulate their concerns to their advisors who are also important in order to survive in academia:

I mean, I think in terms of like, I don't have any family here, but like, Dr. Finley (his advisor), I, I often did. Yeah, I often... he's sort of like my, he's the guy that's sort of like the traffic cop, sort of, of my whole graduate school experience here. And I..., I asked him a ton of questions. And like, he usually, you know, if I have concerns about things, I often will tell him and he'll help calm me down if I like really stressed out and like... So I really talked to Dr. Finely a lot, he's just really good. And that is a really good (D1 L427-431).

As we mentioned earlier in this part of the chapter that, when reflecting upon his story, James had a more structural approach to his narratives while the female participants focused more on personal relationships. This impacted my write up of their stories – for the female participants, their stories are organized around several important critical moments of their graduate teaching, with detailed descriptions on their emotions and feelings during this time. Meanwhile, James's narratives focus more on his thoughts and opinions about his own teaching and learning experiences as a doctoral student in different education settings, instead of only on

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his feelings and emotions. The same will also be seen in Michael's story. As the second white male participant of this study, Michael also adopted a more critical structural examination of his experiences working in the Education Department.

Michael's Story

Michael is a 45-year-old White male who is a fifth-year Ph.D. student at T University. He also currently works full time in the federal prison system. He got into a local community college right after he graduated from high school. However, he dropped out of it shortly after, then he went to a local small state college in 1993, and he dropped out again. He finally returned to the same state college in 1996. While studying there, a few professors commented on his ability, which inspired him tremendously since he was always questioning his talent and feeling he was incapable of doing school work well. This was the first time he thought that he could succeed at school if he was fully committed to his schooling.

After graduation, Michael worked briefly in a literacy program that served local low-income kids. Then, he worked as a finance manager for a while and went back for his Master's degree. He finished his Master's degree in May of 2007. Then he began to work for the Bureau of Prisons. He started his doctoral study in the Fall semester of 2014 unofficially (he took doctoral level classes before he applied for his doctoral program). When he spoke with me, it was his fifth year of doctoral studies, and he was working on his dissertation.

In terms of his home life, he is a father to two small kids, a five-year-old boy and a two-year-old girl. Michael worked at the federal prison system full time while completing his doctoral study: "I had 15 hours of graduate work, and I taught a class" (D1 L182-183). This piece of information contradicts what I have known about the number of credits that graduate

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students could take in the Education Department at T University, which should be no more than 12 credits per semester. I am wondering if, through this piece of contradictory information, Michael wanted to show me how busy he is, which also fits within the neoliberal “busyness” discourse I will discuss in Chapter 5.

Life was tough for him as a doctoral student for the first few years. For him, a typical day starts at 5 am, and he works until 11 am. After that, he usually picks up his son from home and takes him to preschool. He then has a couple of hours to read in between before he picks up his son and transports him from school to home. He goes back to work for a few more hours after that. For the evening, he usually spends several hours writing either at home or at the library. There are times he writes until early morning, and then he just goes directly to work without any sleep. Despite his busy schedule, Michael sees his Ph.D. work as a stress reliever since he can spend lots of his time to read the works from some of his favorite philosophers.

During the interview, Michael didn’t mention the reasons of why he is so passionate about philosophy of education and it was confusing for me to understand why Michael would devote so much time to reading these literature works rather than spending time with his family. Unlike the female participants’ narratives, which focus heavily on family life, Michael rarely mentioned this aspect of his life during the interview. From my perspective, it seems like reading philosophical works is the way he used to shield himself off shortly from his external environment including his stressful work situation, as well as his family life.

Michael comes from the Southern part of the state in which T University is located and it is a region usually associated with high poverty rates. This background has always made him feel that he is “beaten down a little” by it because of the negative perceptions people usually hold for

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those who comes from the rural parts of the state (D1 L68). At times, his background makes him think that he is inferior to the others (D1 L201). He was raised as a Christian, and his dream job is to continue teaching philosophy courses to graduate students in higher education after he graduates.

During the interviews, Michael was very honest about his poor performance at school when he was young. He struggled a lot back then and was often called “lazy” by his teachers. He said that he was always trying to act like a clown in class, which worked almost like a defense mechanism against failing (D1 L1004). It was not until he became an adult that he found out that he has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Dyslexia. Similar to Maggie, Michael’s decision to come back to school was also entirely out of the internal drive to prove to himself that he is just as capable of learning as everyone else. Michael was also not shy about his diagnosis in front of his students. He would usually bring this up at the very beginning of the semester to show his students that as long as they devote themselves to their schoolwork, they are able to do as well as everyone else.

Overall studying experiences. When Michael first started his doctoral program, he wanted to get an Ed.D. Degree since he thought this was the only degree offered by the Education Department at T University, which accepts people who work full-time. However, one of the professors he worked with suggested to him that he “was wasting his time with the Ed.D” (D2 58-59) and that he should talk to the director in charge of the Ph.D. program instead. Michael never explained why his professor suggested that it was a waste of time for him to study for his Ed.D. Instead, Michael took this comment as an affirmation, as evidence that he is not just capable, but also maybe even good at what he was doing (D1 L66-67). As an Ed. D. student myself, I was somewhat disturbed by Michael’s comments (and that he said it directly to me

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knowing full well that I was an Ed. D. student). But, his comments made me curious about the divide between the Ed. D. and Ph. D. degrees and how they affect GTAs' experiences.

Houston (1983) in his research suggested that informal observations hinted at a persistent tendency for both academic and professional hiring authorities to discriminate against individuals who hold an Ed.D. rather than a Ph.D. degree in higher education. As an Ed.D. student, I happen to share the same understanding. I can still recall the comments made by one of the professors I had in the past, who suggested to us in class that Ed.D. students are always second-class citizens in higher education when compared to Ph.D. students. It seems like the same implication is also made in Michael's story, and a broad community in higher education also shares a similar understanding regarding the two types of degrees (e.g., "Ed.D. vs. Ph.D. in Education Administration," 2006).

As Baltodano (2012) suggests, neoliberalism has brought fundamental changes to the way schools of education prepare professional educators and among them is the pressure for schools of education to produce fast-track teacher preparation programs that bypass traditional requirements, for instance, the No Child Left Behind Act has led to cultivating fast-track Ed.D. students in teacher education programs to train school administrators to raise test scores. This may be one of the reasons, which can be used to partially explain the widespread beliefs people hold towards Ed.D. holders.

Michael received much support from the professors he worked with while studying at T University. These professors helped him tremendously in terms of recognizing his strengths and directing him onto the correct path. However, he was never appointed any advisors officially while studying there, which did not seem to bother him much since this gave him a lot of freedom to create his program of study (D2 L242). "I never really felt like I need help. It is sort

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of like the whole advisor thing and trying to come on my own path. I have taken it when it felt like it was good advice. But I don't necessarily seek it out unless it is something that is wrestled with and decided that I can't come to what I think would be a good solution (D2 L810-815). He later added that it actually aggravates him when people try to offer help for him (D2 L832).

Michael didn't explain the reason for this and I am wondering if it is related to the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" Appalachian mentality he embraces, which is often associated with the efforts of disowning the labels the external world gives to the people who live in this region.

Overall teaching experiences. When first admitted to his doctoral program, Michael was able to work as a Graduate Research Assistant (RA) in the Education Department, a position he later resigned. While working as an RA, Michael said that the instruction given to him was unclear despite his repeated requests for personal meetings, and he was uncertain what tasks he needed to accomplish. So, by the end of the first semester, he turned in what he had worked on, along with his resignation letter. In turn, he received emails from the professor he worked for claiming that Michael was the "worst and most incompetent student that the professor has ever dealt with" (D1 L1099, D2 L316). Michael said that right after this, he wanted to take this incident "to the top" (to the Chair of the Department) (D1 L1107-1108). However, he didn't do such a thing out of his respect for his doctoral co-chairs back then, since they advised him not to do so. For Michael, his initial thought on the advice given by his co-chairs was that these professors didn't have tenure. For him, it seemed that his co-chairs' suggestion was made out of the fear that they may be placed in a bad situation because his employer could potentially undermine their tenure cases (D2 L329-331).

Aside from his RA experiences, Michael also had some teaching experiences in the Education Department of T University. He taught one undergraduate class to the preservice

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teachers of the 4-Year Teacher Education Program as an adjunct instructor. He also taught several additional graduate classes through his Teaching Practicum courses, which he needed to complete as part of his program requirements. Teaching Practicum typically consists of supervised, mentored teaching. When reflecting upon his experiences of teaching different courses, Michael mentioned that he preferred to teach those courses which gave him more freedom to construct the curriculum. To fully explain what he meant, Michael brought up his experience when he taught an undergraduate course to preservice teachers. Another professor designed the course, and Michael worked as an adjunct. He usually would bring a weekly supplemental article for the students. However, students would often complain about that and make harsh critiques about the piece that Michael selected for being too difficult to read. Michael had a hard time figuring out the reasons for the push back from the students since he believed that the pieces he selected were well worth reading (D2 L376 & L524). The comments from the students made Michael feel like he was failing them; however, he realized that this had less to do with his personal feelings and more to do with his professional development. Michael further explained that he didn't feel hurt personally since, at his age, not being good at something doesn't necessarily bother him (D2 L462). He simply took this as something he needs to continue working on.

What strikes me about Michael is his attitude towards the failures of his life. Quite contrary to the female participants, who seemed to live in constant fear of failing, Michael did not, and neither did he feel like he was letting someone else down. For him, failing in the academic situation was more related to "grades and the idea of not doing the thing you are supposed to be doing" (D2 L564-565).

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Moreover, when it comes down to students' evaluations, Michael also adopted an entirely different attitude towards students' feedback when compared to the female participants: "Failure doesn't bother me.... I don't care, though, at the end of the day, I do care what they had to say if it is something that I can use to, to help me become better" (D2 L591). For Michael, students' comments, regardless of positive or negative, are just feedback, and he rarely attaches any personal emotions to his students' opinions (D2 L597-598). In the meantime, Tina, Maggie, and I scrutinized students' evaluations and took them as a way to validate our teaching abilities. I believe the reasons behind this are multilayered. Firstly, similar to James, most of Michael's teaching experiences are gained through his Teaching Practicum courses. At the same time, Tina, Maggie, and I were paid to teach, which might explain the different attitudes we had towards students' evaluation.

As I mentioned in James's story, gender could play a role in terms of the different attitudes that male and female teachers have had towards students' evaluations. For instance, in a large study conducted by Bennett (1982) it was found that female instructors are subject to culturally conditioned gender stereotypes, and they usually are perceived as warmer individuals. However, they are often required by the students to offer more significant interpersonal support and are judged more closely than their male colleagues.

In the meantime, when teaching graduate-level philosophy classes, Michael mentioned that he was given more freedom in terms of co-constructing the course, and he had more say in terms of which direction the course should take than when he taught the undergraduate course as an adjunct (D2 L389). When comparing his experiences of teaching in the two different levels in higher education, Michael said that he felt differently for both groups of students. He liked to work with his graduate students more than his undergraduate students. Michael continued

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explaining that it could be because “one student might be more intelligent than another” (D2 L497). He further suggested that, for some of the undergraduate students, they ended up in the 4-Year Teacher Education Program because they didn’t have the prerequisites of getting into the 5-Year Teacher Education Program; he took that to mean that they were an academically weaker group. Aside from the intelligence (D2 L538) aspect, Michael mentioned that he felt more connected with the graduate students since they put more effort into their work and understanding the materials given to them, instead of complaining about the difficulties of the reading materials like what the undergraduates did. Also, that class was much smaller when compared to the undergraduate class (D2 L538-544).

What is good teaching? For Michael, teaching was definitely not his first desire, “and then even once I turned to it, not sure it was more of a convenience” (D3 L114-118). I am wondering if this is another reason why he didn’t scrutinize students’ evaluation when compared to the female participants. Despite his lack of desire for teaching, however, Michael does have some opinions about what good education is. When talking about his ideas on what is good teaching, Michael mentioned that good teachers should not be afraid of not meeting the certain expectations imposed on them through a given position (D3 L125-127). Instead, good teachers “get beyond the fear of performing that same ideology and that sort of produces these expectations of what a teacher is supposed to be and how teachers are supposed to act and do” (D3 L130-131). From my perspective, this seems like a critique to the neoliberal culture of performativity, which judges teachers based on their measurable outputs which constraints teachers actions and emotions (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). For Michael, teachers should feel authentic about themselves, which is the foundation for cultivating nurturing relationships with their students (D3 L133-134). However, the current teacher education system is “still putting out

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teachers that are producing the same, same things we have always had” (D3 L137-138). Michael continued, saying:

They know the determinant of whether or not they are a good teacher has nothing to do with the way they might be perceived by their traditional authority of what makes a good teacher. So, it's, it's being competent enough in your own philosophy and your own ideology of what it is that you need to do to connect with your teacher, or to connect with your students (D3 L150-153).

Similar to James, Michael also adopted a structural critique of the current education system. For him, teachers should not “bottle up” their passion and desire to perform for those who are in power (D3 L155-158).

Michael’s ideas on education and research are intrinsically related to his working experiences in the federal prison. Initially, Michael was planning to conduct a phenomenological study on the inmates he works with in prison, and he changed his topic halfway through his time in graduate school, though, due to the ethical problems involved in the researcher’s and participants’ relationship. He was interested in the subject of the “school to prison pipeline,” and he believed that many of the inmates he worked with didn’t have the language to describe or even understand what happened to them when they were in school. Through his phenomenological study, he hoped to help these inmates reflect upon and understand their experiences. Since many of these inmates feel that they are not built for the school, and Michael wanted to help them realize that it was not their fault and instead, the school system was not really designed for them in the first place (D1 L937-938).

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From Michael's perspective, many of the inmates' identities were built in the "school to prison pipeline" system, which makes them feel that schools are never for them. When schools shut down on them, there needs to be another possibility for this group of people to explore their potential and their worth, which could potentially change their morals, and hence lead to less criminal behavior (D1 L486-488).

Michael believes that the current education system has veered far from Thomas Jefferson's idea about education. Its goal was, according to Michael, to "educate the masses in a way that the democracy could replicate itself" (D1 L588-589). However, Michael agreed with my own critique of neoliberalism; he saw that capitalism now is seeping into everything, including the education system (D1 L593-594). For him, education has become a value-driven commodity, and people depend upon information from sources such as US News and World Report to choose schools for their children. This decision-making process is also based on the "investment model" (D3 L231) that the amount of money you pay for schools equals the quality of education you will get out of it (McGuigan, 2014).

Moreover, Michael believes, education today is more about finding a job than about cultivating democracy (D3 L217-218). This kind of educational system forces teacher education programs to produce teachers who adopt a very rote and practical ideology without fundamental theories or philosophical understandings of education (D3 L228-230). Michael further explains that:

The crux of the problem is probably far more political and is well above the, the ability of administrators and definitely above the ability of educators at the higher education level to fix what it is that needs to be fixed (D3 L243-245).

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With this statement, it seems like Michael is suggesting that those who work for the neoliberal education system (such as the teachers and the administrators) have little control over what's happening and what needs to be fixed, but to comply. Reflecting upon the entire interviews, I did notice that Michael made a structural critique towards the current education system but he provided very little suggestion in terms of how to advocate for change.

Race, gender, social class, and privilege. When asked about his experience of studying in a department which is majority female, Michael said that never bothered him and he “don’t even consider that” (D2 L667). His opinion, according to him, could be part of the results of “the privilege (as a white male) that people never really understand or maybe even have access to ... But we take for granted” (D2 670, 672).

However, this is not to say that Michael never had any issues with his colleagues. Following this comment, Michael shared a story of what happened in one of the courses he took previously, in which he was the only male student. He enjoyed this class, and he tried to share his opinions with his classmates and make compliments towards one of his classmates about how intelligent she was. However, it was later that he learned his classmate hated him. He stated that a similar pattern happened to him very often. He said that he didn’t intend to do anything to hurt anyone; hence, he didn’t give his classmate’s comment about him any deep reflection (D2 L701 & L703). Similar things also happened several times between him and some other members of his department. He didn’t spell out the details of these interactions. However, after these unpleasant incidents, he tried to make himself more aware of how his maleness and White privilege plays out in his working environment (D2 L722). At some level, similar to Tina’s fear of misinterpretation of her race, Michael also experienced fear related to gender and race; he tried to be more aware of how he represented himself and how others might perceive him in the

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academic setting (D2 L727). The difference was that Tina was from an oppressed racial group, yet Michael's race and gender were in the majority.

These unpleasant experiences didn't stop Michael from continuing to share his opinions with others. To an extent, he felt that it is his responsibility to share due to his rural /country backgrounds, as well as his disabilities. Instead of feeling silenced by his history, he felt obligated to speak up for himself: "I think (my disability) still had its oppressive, you know, aspect or characteristic. ... It's important that I do put it out there, and I do make it known that my experiences and what I have to say are important things, and they do matter" (D2 L767-777).

In the midst of talking about his experiences of teaching the graduate level class and his idea about some other philosophical theories, all of a sudden Michael started to tell a story about his co-worker's wife (a White female) who applied for a grant offered by a youth foundation based in Baltimore, whose members are mostly African Americans. One statement made to her was that some part of her proposal was offensive, but in reality, from the perspective of the grant applicant, it was not her intention to make anyone feel offended. Instead, it was just a simple disagreement between her and the others. While the members of the foundation questioned her proposal, she sat there quietly and didn't say anything. Michael then continued, saying:

But, um, but anyway, it's, um, you have to sort of have it that, you know, I, and double, a double edge sword. Um, and I think specifically here is really tough. Um, well even, um, I know professors and they get there, they're allowed to disagree with me. They can have opinions, but I know professors here that, um, are, um, some very opposed to presenting things like White privilege and I am so often classified to certain groups (D1 L301-308).

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From my perspective, Michael seemed quite uncomfortable when discussing the issue of White Privilege, as shown from all the filler words he used in his speech such as “ums” and “well.” Following this comment, Michael shared a story from one of his uncles, who was a coal miner in the Southern part of the region. He started to work at the age of 11, right after his father’s death, and he worked for nearly 50 years in the coal mines and eventually passed away from lung cancer. Through his uncle’s story, Michael then suggested that the “academic/the liberal elite” (D1 L319) and their ideas about “White privilege” lose touch with the poor White working-class. Since for the latter, such as his uncle, had to work hard all his life to earn what he had instead of simply getting things because he is white.

From Michael’s perspective, White privilege is a very general privilege, which he compared to a police battery situation, “At times; it can be fuzzy on both sides” (D1 L380-383). He also believes that the term “White privilege” has been abused just like the catchy phrase/symbol line (D1 L393) of “Black Lives Matter” (D1 L389) which may imply that other lives don’t matter (D1 L389) in Michael’s thinking. Michael then suggests that “intersectionality” is a much better tool to study the multiple identities people have and hence will help us understand the complexity of human beings. He then tries to explain what he meant with the following scenario:

If I have a white male and a Black Male (who) grew up in southern West Virginia and very similar circumstances, both are coal miners, then the white male is going to have probably more access to certain things at certain times in his life. Um, but when you just throw out a word like “privilege” that feels very personal rather than very general (D1 L423-429).

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From my perspective, as with most of us in the study, it seems like Michael also had a hard time battling with racial issues. To start with, when we were discussing the different attitudes we adopted towards students' evaluations, Michael tried to take a step back to reflect upon how his maleness and Whiteness played out in terms of the positions he holds towards students' comments (D2 L642). However, he was also reluctant to acknowledge the existence of "White privilege" because of his own socio-cultural upbringing. Lastly, he tried to recognize how some minorities, such as African Americans, might be pushed out of the education system in the U.S. historically (D1 L492-499). To make his point clear, he stated the following in the interview:

Yeah. Brown vs. Education. Yeah, there were, there was like so many underlying factors with, uh, obviously you have a Cold War with Russia. Um, and at that time Russia was, uh, uh, they were educating their Black population and so they were, whatever word you would use, propaganda, advertising, they were putting the word out like, "Whoa, who are these people the U.S.) to say that, you know, that everybody else is not civilly, uh, up to par when they have an entire portion of their population that they, they don't even treat as well as their pets basically? So this was gaining traction and we had to do something in response to keep, you know, to keep that from spreading. So the, so obviously you can, you can never prove anything like that, but I hadn't been there as that, that, that, uh, we only did it, but we only, uh, might be segregated because of, uh, the, the pressure from, uh, from outside of the country (D1 L534-547).

He then further suggests that even in modern times, the current education system is not designed for African American students either (D1 L561-562). The current classroom norms in schools are middle class, white American norms which may make the Black students feel they

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are set up to fail even at the very beginning of their education (D1 L912-917). I was unable to find any information on this piece of history, which draws connections between the “Brown vs. Education” movement and international competition with Russia. On the one hand, as his audience, from this example, I almost have a sense of feeling that his understanding of racial issues is fragmented and as a White male, he tried to acknowledge his privilege as well as how minorities are marginalized due to their race in the society through his statement. However, on the other hand, I also feel that Michael is struggling to fully understand the complexity of the racial issues and he chose to confess this differently: “I sometimes have trouble finding words myself. Like I said, like Heidegger says, we are, we are slaves to our language” (D2 L657-658).

As we mentioned earlier, his understanding of privilege is more about the unearned advantage that someone receives (mostly material possessions) by being born into a specific group (“Understanding race and privilege,” 2016). Michael was raised in a working-class family in a rural Appalachian setting, which is a region that often suffers from poverty. He inherited nothing from his family and hence, at times, it may be hard for him to associate himself with certain privileges only based on his whiteness. However, while many Americans may not view themselves as privileged because of their economic or social status, the advantage of being in the majority racial group is real, even if often hidden (“Understanding race and privilege,” 2016). For instance, being privileged could also mean that one can carry out simple life activities without considering his/her race, such as shopping at a store without the fear of being followed.

As the researcher, I am actually familiar with the same kind of struggle he experienced with race. My husband is a white male who came from a working-class family in rural Missouri. No one has ever handed down anything to him since he graduated from high school, and during our seven years of marriage, I have seen how much he has struggled at times. From my

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perspective, it is tough for me to relate him with the word “privilege.” However, at the same time, I cannot help but notice that I am treated differently by others in public and in the university with and without my husband’s presence.

Suggestions for the professors and other GTAs. Reflecting upon his experience of studying at T University, Michael said that one way a professor could help their students to grow is to recognize the ways of pushing on the students to move forward but at the same time without being too pushy (D1 L1030-1031). Moreover, drawing upon his experience of working with his mentor for his Teaching Practicum, Michael mentioned that it made him feel great when he was treated as an equal /as a colleague by the professor he worked with (D2 L573-574). In terms of suggestions for the other GTAs, similar to what Tina, Maggie and James all suggested in their stories, Michael said that GTAs must stay honest to themselves and be very self-reflective, which will help them to recognize their own weakness, to be comfortable with that.

Chapter 5: Implications and Conclusions

In Chapter 4, I explored how the complex layers of GTAs' identities influenced their interactions within the neoliberal higher education space. Through the group stories, I hoped to reveal the hidden aspects of the higher education context, as well as the paradoxes of dominant neoliberal discourses which I believe are central to our understandings about the meaning of truth, fairness, and equity embedded in neoliberal academic settings. I started with four research questions in mind:

R1. According to GTAs, how are neoliberal power relations constructed in their daily activities related to their positions and identities?

R2. How, according to GTAs, have these relations influenced their interactions with their professors, colleagues, and students?

R3. How do GTAs understand and mediate the conflicts they encounter in their daily lives, and how do they make sense of their experiences?

R4. What ideas do GTAs suggest for better navigating neoliberal power relations?

Narrative Themes

Through this study, I have found three major themes across the participants' narratives. These themes reflect and resonate with the research questions for the study. These constitute a "group" story that I present after introducing the themes and connecting them to the research questions.

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Theme 1: Neoliberal Penetration in GTAs' Lives

Neoliberal discourses have penetrated every aspect of GTAs' academic lives, which forced us to talk about and conduct ourselves in ways that were most desired by the neoliberal institution, or what Foucault refers to as "the technology of the self" (Foucault, 1998). As a result, our relationships with our professors, colleagues, as well as our students, have changed profoundly. This theme resonates strongly with research question 1 about power and research question 2 about relationships.

Theme 2: GTAs' Intersectional Identities

GTAs' experiences in the neoliberal institution became more complicated when different and multiple identities were taken into consideration since each of us is positioned differently by the system due to the layered identities we possess. This created a mass site of struggle within each of us. The theme of intersectional identities connects with research question 1 about power, research question 3 about conflicts, and research question 4 about navigation.

Theme 3: GTAs' Self-care

Many of the participants have adopted Foucault's notion of "the care of the self" (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) as a way to approach the complex relationships in the neoliberal working environment and to resist neoliberal governmentalities. The "care of the self," requires individuals to not only examine the various things that present themselves for admission to the soul or mind of the individual, but the individual seeing to his or her own constitution by consciously deciding on his or her character and direction of existence, to the extent that such is under the individual's control (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999).

The Group Story: Interweaving the Narrative Themes

To narrate how the individuals' narrative threads intertwine into a larger story, I elaborate on the details and complexities as they were told and retold in the narrative inquiry. Neoliberal power has been constructed and enacted through the prevailing neoliberal discourses circulating within the higher education space and it has forced GTAs to conduct themselves in ways which could be read as responsible by those in power.

Through the course of the research, I became aware of an important context framing the ecology of the university; this ecology in many ways brings together the experiences of myself and the participants. In 2015, T University achieved Carnegie R1 research status (highest research institution) and has maintained this status since then. To qualify for the R1 status, an institution will need to award at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees per year and accumulate at least \$5 million in total research expenditures ("Basic classification description," n.d.). As mentioned earlier in this paper, an R1 label can solidify a university's reputation and hence make the university stand out (Anderson, 2016). The purpose of this is to secure its place in the highly competitive neoliberal research landscape (Trent, 2019), which has put many faculty members under a tremendous amount of pressure.

As an R1 institution, the lives of the professors at the Education Department at T University are undoubtedly affected by the institutional agenda. They need to produce a considerable number of publications and apply for and in some cases obtain major research grants in order to secure the institution's place in the marketplace. At the same time, due to state budget constraints connected to global neoliberalism and the extractive economy, they must take on additional teaching and service loads to reduce departmental expenses, especially when the

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university is facing a financial crisis. The quality of their services is closely scrutinized for annual review, tenure and promotion, which in turn puts the professors under much stress.

As a result, the lives of GTAs are unavoidably affected due to the liminal identities they possess. On the one hand, they are hired to take up classes so that professors can focus on their research agendas, which includes spending time supporting GTAs to learn how to conduct research. However, the participants of this study often felt lost in their first-year college teaching despite their many years of prior K-12 teaching experiences. According to them, college teaching is an entirely different teaching experience, and professors often had little time to guide their instruction in a way that the participants of this study expected due to their already filled up teaching, research, and service agendas (as perceived by the participants).

Also, for some professors who are new graduates themselves and did not have mentored college teaching experiences themselves, they often felt they needed to be guided by more senior faculty during their first years as a faculty member (“Benefits of a mentor during your first year as faculty,” 2017). Yet, they were positioned to be the mentors of doctoral students in some cases. Hence, they may be unable to offer quality mentorship to their graduate students because of their lack of experience doubled with challenging expectations and lack of support for their own work. Due to the budget cuts, new professors in the Education Department at T University are sometimes forced to take up extra service loads to mentor their students instead of focusing on building up their own research experience. However, GTAs in this study, including myself, have very little understanding of this aspect of the professors’ lives.

When teaching guidance was presented to GTAs by professors, the participants of this study ironically often read it as extra surveillance placed over them, which stressed them out

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even further. As mentioned in previous chapters of the dissertation, accepting mentoring generally is accepting a site of governmentality and power. Supervision of GTAs' teaching work by professors is perceived as an even more intensive surveillance mechanism used by specific mentors, which often demonstrated the intuitional power and responsibility invested in them and imposed on them by the neoliberal higher education enterprise (Manathunga, 2007). In order to please the supervisor and secure and maintain departmental funding for their positions, GTAs in this study usually needed to carefully observe the technology employed by those in power and then talk about and conduct themselves accordingly. As a result, the prevailing technology (neoliberal discourses and practices) transformed their bodies and souls (Mazzola, 2019) in a way that could be read as responsible and employable. The neoliberal phrase "tick the boxes" (Pritchard, 2017) was often heard through individuals' stories to ensure they were meeting the expectations of those in power, which also shows how neoliberal discourses speak through us. Moreover, participants' stories often contradicted with their emotions during this process, which indicates the internal struggles they bear. As a result, it seems like the participants of this study desired and feared regulations and autonomy at the same time, as it was suggested by them that too much independence might lead to the feeling of lost and/or intensified supervision ultimately lead to a strong desire to escape.

On the other hand, neoliberalism encourages people to view themselves as a set of manageable assets, and by investing in themselves through education, they can establish their values as entrepreneurs (Sugarman, 2015). Under such an ideology, students usually view their education as a personal investment, and they get frustrated or even angry when they feel they can't get a legitimate return on their tuition money, which has put GTAs under a tremendous amount of pressure.

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GTAs in this study, especially female participants, often struggled for authority and power in their classroom. Sometimes they believed that through their physical appearance/dress that they show their "preparedness" for teaching, hoping to be treated as the "real professor" by undergraduates so that they can make these students feel that their money was well spent. Although undergraduate students' evaluations of GTAs were low risk in this specific research context, female participants still closely scrutinized them in a fashion similar to reading customer satisfaction survey reports, which they also used as a way to validate their teaching. This shows how the neoliberal audit culture has infiltrated our thoughts and behaviors and coaxed us to evaluate our own value based upon external teaching standards without resistance, all for the goal of achieving "continuous quality improvement" so that teacher education programs can consistently produce preservice teachers who can raise their own students' scores (Mountz et al., 2015).

Democratic educators often try to establish a reciprocal relationship with their students, in which the latter are actively involved as change agents and the key to such a relationship is the authenticity of the educators so that they can make sincere connections with their students (J. Collins, Hess, & Lowery, 2019). The neoliberal educational practices, as we mentioned earlier, have changed teacher-student relationships in teacher education programs since the ideological context of education usually influences such a relationship. And under neoliberal ideology, undergraduate teachers in training are expected to be "academically" and "professionally" equipped for the job market (Giles, 2008). As a result, progressive and humanizing pedagogies are no longer the goal of teaching; instead, the pressure of "ticking the boxes" to ensure the satisfaction of the managers and the consumers becomes paramount for teacher educators cultivating new graduates.

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In the meantime, as students, GTAs were also inevitably influenced by the popular neoliberal "investment model of education." For instance, they expected their professors/programs to provide them with more hands-on guidance in terms of their teaching and research practice. This is shown through their anxious talk about producing as many publications as possible in order to meet the expectations of the neoliberal marketplace. However, at times, the expectations of the professors were not adequately addressed as a result of the busy research, teaching, and service agendas of professors assigned in higher education institutions. Moreover, the different teacher-student power relations as well as the lack of effective communication systems between the two groups of people may also account for the GTAs' frustrations of not having their needs met.

On the other hand, under neoliberal discourses of "preparedness," GTAs were expected to be ready to teach rather than to be prepared by mentors to do so since they were hired to reduce the undergraduate teaching burdens of professors so that the latter might focus on teaching upper level classes and mentoring doctoral students in research. GTAs were not hired to add to professors' workloads by requiring undergraduate teaching mentorship in excess of professors' teaching loads. This is another paradox of neoliberal discourses. As students, the participants of this study viewed education as personal investments for the betterment of their careers. Hence, they carried certain expectations of their professors, hoping they might get a legitimate return on their investments especially when their whole family was involved in the decision of returning for graduate school. This created a mismatch between the professors' and GTAs' expectations of each other. One thing I would like to point out is that most of the participants in this study had years of experience studying solely at small liberal arts colleges and/or small state universities, in which they had more opportunities for personal interaction with their professors. However, in an

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R1 institution, such as T University, it almost seems unrealistic for professors to fulfill the R1 expectations and at the same time, fully meet the diverse needs of their graduate students.

Aside from these common themes emerging across individuals' stories, I considered how each individual was uniquely situated to imagine a fuller picture of the participants' experiences within the neoliberal education context. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, mentoring generally was taken up as a site of governmentality and power (Manathunga, 2007). Hence, GTAs' experiences can also be highly unique from one another due to the different mentors they worked with. Under the neoliberal marketplace principles, subjects such as teacher education or math education were marginalized since they did not generate substantial financial gain either for the university or individuals in comparison to working in STEM fields as an engineer, for example. At T University, at times it was hard for some professors to get enough students to register for the courses they offered; hence, to validate their positions, they put intensive efforts into cultivating their GTAs. As word spread among the GTAs, many expected the same level of guidance from all the professors they worked with. This led to a mismatch of expectations between the professors and the GTAs, as mentioned above. What made things worse is that there was no formalized direct, open communication mechanism existing between the two groups of people.

The participants' experiences become more complicated when intersectionality was taken into consideration (race/ethnicity, gender, social class, and cultural orientation). To begin with, fear and anxiety are two types of emotions consistent throughout the female participants of colors' stories. When compared to their white male colleagues' narratives, it seemed like the two female GTAs of color were more likely to hide their feelings of fear and less likely to ask for help when they were in need. Moreover, four out of the five participants interviewed in this study

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were around their mid-30s in age; the struggles of balancing their academic and home lives were prevalent across their stories. This was especially true for female participants. Neoliberalism required a new type of female as subjects of freedom, choice, and empowerment, who conducted oneself based on a rational cost-benefit calculation (E. Chen, 2013). However, the female image created by neoliberal culture does not challenge the gender status quo. Instead, under the disguise of "free choice" women often invariably end up making the same choices made up by the normative culture (E. Chen, 2013). This also explains some of the struggles that the female GTAs faced in this study. They actively embrace the image of powerful superwomen desired by neoliberal pop culture. For them, education is a way to invest in themselves and hence help them to achieve such an image. However, at the same time, they also have to perform the traditional gendered role in their family life, such as taking care of the kids, cooking and doing laundry, etc., which often created struggles and guilt among the female GTAs in this study when they inevitably failed to perform every task to its finest form.

Social class status and the feeling of fitting in to the culture of higher education tend to go hand-in-hand in the literature (e.g. Archer, 2008; Langhout et al., 2007, etc.). The stories I have collected from the participants failed to support this assumption. The five participants of this study all have different social backgrounds, from lower class to working-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds. Regardless of the participants' social and economic status, none of them felt that they were adequately prepared for doing their doctoral studies. So, I am wondering who exactly is the popular neoliberal "preparedness" discourse for? Who are the "able" ones? Moreover, one thing I would like to point out in this study is that none of the participants came from the upper class, and I wonder if my interpretations would still be supported if I included upper class participants in the study from the very beginning.

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Finally, individualistic attitudes perpetuated by neoliberal ideology were problematic for some of the participants, especially when the participants were communally oriented (all of the participants except for Michael). The feelings of isolation from their surroundings were exacerbated when the Appalachian social context was taken into consideration, as it also perpetuates a similar individualistic mentality. This affects both male and female participants of this study. For the neoliberal culture, individualism is tied closely to neoliberal forms of governance, which place much emphasis upon the idea of "responsible individuals" who take responsibility for their own welfare and govern themselves in appropriate ways (Joseph, 2013). On the other hand, the individualistic mentality within the Appalachian context has more to do with disowning the label (such as lazy welfare recipients) that outsiders have historically given to the people of this region (Root, 2017).

The mismatch between participants' communal cultural backgrounds and the individualistic culture promoted in their academic environment leads to strong feelings of isolation among this group of students (Smith et al., 2014). For instance, James had a hard time building close relationships with the other graduate teaching assistants when he was still studying in the Math Department, due to the competitive atmosphere perpetuated by the neoliberal education environment.

Overall, this study has helped to fill the gap in my knowledge and experiences about working as a GTA of color in the neoliberal higher educational space. The collective stories from the five GTAs revealed that we are all vulnerable in different ways to the dominant neoliberal discourse and practices within the higher education space. From the illustration above, we can conclude that each of the identities that the participants possess adds layers to the feelings they

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feel in the neoliberal academic place. In the next parts of this chapter, I build on the feelings of the participants to suggest positive change.

Implications

Conceptual and Theoretical Implications

Power, knowledge, and discourse. From a Foucauldian (1972) perspective, discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge; hence it influences how ideas are put into practice and can be used to regulate the behavior of the others, by limiting and restricting other ways of how we talk about and conduct ourselves in relation to the constructions of our knowledge about specific topics (Hall, 2001). In this particular study context, neoliberal ideology has infiltrated participants' narratives and constrained how they talk about themselves and how they understand the world. One example would be the prevalent talk about "busyness" across all of the narratives. I am not trying to deny my participants' experiences nor suggesting that they are exaggerating their feelings when I state that it is hard for me to relate to them on this point. As a person who comes from a culture that often advocates for "hard and long time work" (Li & Park, n.d.), it was rare for me to hear conversations about staying busy explicitly back home. From my perspective, it seems like the idea of "busyness" is internalized and normalized in most Asian cultures, and that is why it is hard for me to pick it out.

I believe that multiple reasons can be used to explain the different attitudes and conversations people have about "busyness" across different cultures. On the one hand, the difference may be related to factors such as people's perceptions about their incomes, freedom, and authority, as well as family values passed down from one generation to the next, etc. (Li & Park, n.d.). On the other hand, I believe neoliberalism also plays a central role, which defines

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how people should think and talk about themselves since the entrepreneur's neoliberal rationalities perpetuate ideas such as "to be more" or "to be self-motivated." Participants in this study, especially the females, often took up the discourse of "busyness" to show that they are continually improving themselves by living busy and productive lives; in contrast, a life that is not 'busy' is considered to be unsuccessful, incomplete, and unfulfilled by society (Petersen & O'Flynn, 2007). I believe this is an example that shows how dominant ideology is enacted through discourse and hence influences the formation of our subjectivities.

According to Foucault, "discourse" is a group of statements which provides a way to represent knowledge; hence, physical things and actions are only meaningful if they become objects of knowledge within discourse (Hall, 2001). Moreover, Foucault also argues that the way that discourse represents knowledge and truth is radically historicized, and things are true only within a specific historical context (Hall, 2001). However, one thing I would like to point out is that the historical discursive turn on particular topics could take up the appearance of being more progressive than the old ones; however, in reality, the new discourse is only another way to disguise/mask the old ones.

For example, the rise of the new type of active female subject in the neoliberal age reflects the workings of the neoliberal process of subjectification as immanent within and responsive to normative power instead of challenging it (E. Chen, 2013). While popular terms such as "choice," "freedom," and "agency" often suggest a feminist legacy, however, in reality, they are used not to advance the feminist cause, but to celebrate a rhetoric of individual choice and freedom which often is measured in terms of commodity consumption in the neoliberal marketplace (E. Chen, 2013). Neoliberal governmentality often only reiterates a set of old concrete practices through its discourse, which encourages individuals to turn themselves into a

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"sovereign" or "free subject" who can make "free choices" (often within a prescribed set of options) that constitutes her individual-ness and subjectivity, which eventually benefits the free marketplace (Inoue, 2007).

This is important to point out, especially for the context of this study since the three female students all brought up the idea that they are somehow struggling with body positivity discourses and feeling anxious about their bodily figures in the context of teaching undergraduate students. For them, understanding the proper dress code and being able to dress up accordingly is extremely important to gaining power and authority in their classroom. It was actually confusing for me at the beginning of my analysis since the influential female figure perpetuated in the neoliberal age seems to be quite different from the old discourse about "Girl Power" which arose in the 1990s and emphasized ultra-feminine looks and a sexualized image as a means of empowerment and agency (E. Chen, 2013). However, the truth is that the seemingly more progressive neoliberal discursive turn of "feminism" or "female power" is not aimed at embracing the feminist movement or to advance social change or eliminate inequality, but to alienate feminism, spell out its obsolescence and reinforce the patriarchal status quo (McRobbie, 2007). Hence, as researchers, I believe we must be aware that part of the inquiry process is also a continuous path of learning in numerous ways, which is also essential for us to fully understand how discourse, power, and knowledge influence the formation of our subjectivities over time.

The last limitation related to this study is the lack of interviews with the faculty members I critique, as well as a lack of study of the institutional context everyone is situated in. As a student myself, I had many concerns of interviewing my professors and administrators of the department due to the unequal power relationships. Hence, at times, it may be hard for the readers to really understand all of the layers involved in constructing the negative emotions

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GTAs experienced since I did not fully explore the various perspectives and angles to see where possibilities lie. As a limitation of the study and as a possible future study, as I move forward, I would like to focus on one perspective from one group of people at a time so that I could look into each group's story in detail.

Intersectionality and positioning theory. This study has employed intersectionality as a tool to explore how GTAs are positioned in the context of neoliberal power relations embedded in the social identities they carry. Intersectionality, as an analytic tool, can capture dynamic power relations and oppression in a way that is sensitive to differences and oppressions both within and among groups (Mattsson, 2014).

Three approaches are usually involved in intersectionality analysis, and they are the inter-categorical /categorical approach, the intra-categorical approach, and an anti-categorical approach (McCall, 2005). This study has employed the categorical approach, which requires scholars to adopt the existing analytical categories to document inequalities since those social categories provide criteria for specifying how people are sorted or placed within a specific social context (Anthias, 2013). The categorical approach also assumes that these social categories, such as gender, social class, etc., as fixed, homogenous, and bounded by social structures (Mattsson, 2014). Hence, such an approach is also associated with particular limitations.

To begin with, the categorical approach starts with the documentation of the unequal relationships which already exist among social groups (Bomert, 2015). However, such social relations are dynamic and may vary with the change of time and space. Hence, to thoroughly investigate the complex relationships among all of the social categories, one needs to conduct exhaustive reviews on prior research related to the topic of investigation. Secondly, this study has adopted a sophisticated categorical approach, which involves the examination of multiple

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social categories (race, gender, social class, and cultural orientation) which influence the identity constructions of the participants in neoliberal educational settings. Hence, the levels of details given for each category (especially when many types are involved) may vary since the researcher may give more focus to some aspects/identities than the other ones (McCall, 2005). As the researcher, I have done my best to provide detailed accounts for each category examined in this study. As I move forward, I would want to explore different ways researchers can conduct their studies which allow us to reach a very detailed and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of inquiry.

Lastly, social categories such as race, gender, and social class are essential strands that constitute the basic pattern of socio-politically relevant inequality (Klinger, 2003, as cited in Bomert, 2015). However, only focusing on identity construction under specific social contexts, and limiting the dimensions of analysis to race, class, and gender (and culture in my study) is insufficient because of the multi-layered possibilities for how a person may be located in society (Bomert, 2015). For example, throughout the study I grew more interested in finding out about the experiences of the GTAs whose identities cross the boundaries of these traditionally constructed groups, for instance a disabled Black woman who is also a member of the LGBTQ group. How might the neoliberal higher education context influence her? Hence, for future study, a combined approach (for instance, anti-categorical and categorical) should also be used to achieve a more critical and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of people who possess these cross-boundary identities.

Methodological Implications

This study used narrative inquiry and adopted a "critical event" approach to deconstruct narratives collected from the participants (Webster & Mertova, 2007b). The identification of critical events and the details surrounding those events often provided insightful information about people's past experiences as well as how we are adapting to new situations (Webster & Mertova, 2007b). However, one problem I have encountered during the narrative inquiry process is that participants sometimes shared their personal stories in a chaotic manner, which made it quite difficult for me to extract these critical moments from their narratives. For instance, when I was interviewing one of the participants, I found that he always circumvented the prompts given instead of staying focused on the questions. For this specific case, I wondered if factors such as the participant's Appalachian cultural background, his maleness, his positionality as a subject in my research as well as his relationship with me, a researcher of color, all played roles in how he interacted with the interview questions. As Minister (1991) pointed out in his work, narrative researchers should be prepared to respond to different communication styles (as cited in Fraser, 2004). I wondered what I might do differently to help the participants reflect upon these critical moments, which have had long-lasting impacts on them.

Moreover, to understand the complex relationships between institutional discourses and how they influenced the everyday narratives of the participants, this study heavily relied on the analysis of discourses at both the personal and institutional levels. Discourse analysis allows narrative researchers to focus on the unilateral influences of institutional discourses (also called power discourses) on everyday lives (Souto-Manning, 2014). However, during the data analysis process, I found that this approach also had its limitations. For instance, in this study, all of the female participants shared their insecurities about their body images, and these discussions were

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made while we were sitting down in a space that neither of us was familiar with. Discourse is very logocentric, and when we are speaking about bodies, it loses other dimensionalities related to bodies and space, for instance, teachers' bodies in the classroom. I wondered how my data might look and what other things I might be able to reveal had I also directly observed their bodies in the classroom. I wondered if the method I chose overlooked other angles about the phenomenon of inquiry at times. These are the kinds of questions I believe that narrative analysis researchers should take into consideration in the future to perhaps achieve a more sophisticated understanding of human experiences and meanings of “story.”

Improving Practice and Policy

Practice Considerations

Relationships within higher educational spaces. In this section of the paper, I will discuss implications of the study on the relationships between mentors (professors) and mentees (GTAs), the relationships among GTAs, as well as the care of the self.

To start with, it is suggested that neoliberal principles have infiltrated faculty members' behaviors and shaped their attitudes as well as their professional work (Levin & Aliyeva, 2015). As shown in this study, faculty members at T University are placed under a tremendous amount of pressure to be efficient and productive in order to compete for resources and recognition within their fields of study. The stress they carry, in turn, inevitably influenced their relationships with the mentees they worked with. At times, GTAs viewed them as "pushy" when they found that the students did not live up to their expectations of being productive and/or efficient. Participants in this study suggested that having a pushy mentor did not necessarily help them to

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develop their teaching abilities. Instead, it only fueled the desire to “run away” from such a mentor-mentee relationship.

An ideal mentor-mentee relationship in a democratic learning environment should be a reciprocal one which involves nurturing, advising, befriending and instructing, and such a relationship connects people with true democratic values, attitudes and understandings which infuse the teaching profession (Mullen, 2017). However, the market driven logics which are prevalent in American research universities nowadays, shape the experiences of faculty members who work for it (Osei-Kofi, 2012) and carelessness is a hidden agenda of neoliberal higher education culture, which is primarily determined by new managerial values and norms (Lynch, 2010). The carelessness agenda influences all individuals (not just the GTAs) who work for the neoliberal institutions. People’s values are judged based upon measurable outputs and everyone is occupied with tasks which need to be accomplished in order to prove our employability. All of these leave us with little room to care for the wellbeing of the others that we work with. As shown in the narratives of the participants, their stories are self-centered in a sense and they showed little interest in the lives of their professors as well as the pressures they might face in the institution.

In order to establish and maintain a true democratic mentoring relationship in which both parties benefit within neoliberal colleges, I argue that spaces should be deliberately created both within and outside of the classrooms. Through these spaces, mentors and mentees might be able to share their emotions as well as vulnerabilities with each other (Bain et al., 2017). Hence, this might disrupt the hierarchies of mentor-mentee relationships and build up a foundation for a truly reciprocal, democratic mentoring relationship in higher education. Only if both parties can see

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things from each other's' perspective, can we to make positive social change within the field of education.

I believe that the collective efforts among the professors and the students will build a haven that protects our vision about what democratic education should be instead of having to face and challenge dominant neoliberal discourses individually.

Secondly, the concept of competitive individualism is central to the neoliberal system, in which there is a prevailing attitude that the individual is responsible for taking care of his/her own needs (Verret, 2012). The relationships among the GTAs and their colleagues have inevitably been influenced by such mentality in the context of the study, and GTAs who are communally oriented often have a hard time fitting in. For instance, James found that the atmosphere at T University to be quite competitive, and people seldom had the freedom to hang out with each other like what he did with his colleagues back at Northern Hills College. Since as an R1 university, people have to take up large workloads which exhausted and stress them out already, people are left with little time for self-care.

In this study, participants who are communally oriented mentioned that they would benefit both emotionally and academically from more peer interactions such as having a more advanced peer as their mentor at the beginning of their doctoral study, who might help them to navigate their program of study as well as guide some of their teaching practices.

Lastly, although the participants did not specifically name this, Foucault's notion of "the care of the self" is mentioned in all of the narratives. It is taken as an effective way to protect ourselves from the dominant neoliberal ideology and create the possibility of thinking about education and ourselves differently, which focuses on the social and emotional wellbeing of

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individuals, instead of only valuing those who are able to produce measurable outputs (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; J. Collins et al., 2019). Being vulnerable is the first step. Meritocratic neoliberalism favors certain personality traits and penalizes the other; such features include being articulate, charismatic, always on the outlook for new stimuli and challenges, and most importantly, needing to talk up one's capacity constantly (Verhaeghe, 2014). However, the emergent characteristics of this "ideal type" of neoliberal are seldom emulated in real life; in other words, it is unrealistic (McGuigan, 2014).

Hence, the first step to break the fetters we are locked in is to recognize and embrace our vulnerability as human beings. Perfectionism may be a desired trait, yet we should also remember that as humans, we're part of nature as well, and we would benefit if we came into acceptance of the natural state of life, which happens to be imperfect (Schwartz, 2008). Recognizing our emotions and being able to overcome the traditional dichotomies of emotion and reason or body and mind will help us to assert individual agency, which is the first step to deal with the competing discourses within the neoliberal higher education space (Zembylas, 2003). Thus, as it is suggested by the participants of this study, one will benefit greatly if he/she can step away from work and spend some quality time focusing on self-care.

"Fitting in" as resistance. Neoliberalism emphasizes the idea of individuals as rational economic beings, who are controlled by a culture of financial fear and insecurity, and investing in education will make them more competitive in the neoliberal market place (Quinn & Bates, 2017). This ideology inevitably influences the participants of this study, and one way to show their employability in the academic job market is to show that they are productive and able to produce high-quality publications consistently. Hence, it will be extremely beneficial if the department and the university could offer classes/programs or allocate fund directly aimed at

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helping the GTAs to build their research experiences that will eventually lead to publications, hence increasing their potential employability in the job market.

Ideally, education must serve the purposes of democracy and teacher educators should strive to design curriculum and projects which will prepare preservice teachers for democratic participation and teaching (A. Trent, Cho, Rios, & Mayfield, 2010). However, as teacher educators, the participants of this study, including myself, have given little thought to what it truly means to teach for democracy. As I mentioned earlier, all of our stories are organized only around our own emotions and needs (for instance, the desire to get good students evaluation results so that we can continually be hired; or to get as many publications as possible in order to be seen as employable by the marketplace). Once again, this showed how deeply we have been influenced and controlled by neoliberal ideology.

Policy Considerations

On the national level, neoliberalism has profound effects on education overall, which has shifted the focus of education towards the testing regime, and the results of the tests are usually used as indicators of the global competitiveness of a country (Kuehn, 2008). This has resulted in changes in the teacher education agenda in some universities, which focus on training teachers as technicians who can prepare students for participation in a competitive globalized economy (Sleeter, 2008). Under the globalized neoliberal education movement, teachers' unions have been playing a leading role in terms of protecting public education from being destroyed by neoliberal policy (Kuehn, 2008). In the context of higher education, graduate students have worked hard to establish unions which allow them to bargain collectively related to pay and working conditions with their universities and at the same time provide them with protection against unfair or

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arbitrary treatment by supervisors, unexpected administrative changes in benefits, and other detrimental situations where they currently lack power (Benderly, 2018).

Participants of this study also suggest that a graduate students' union is necessary in order to meet the needs of GTAs. Some of them argued that contrary to their experiences when working in K-12 education settings where their rights as educators are explained to them at meetings with administrators and teachers' unions, this higher education setting lacked a GTA union. The responsibilities of GTAs are often openly discussed at the departmental level as well as in personal meetings with the professors, yet the rights of GTAs are left unaddressed. Hence, universities should support the establishment of graduate students' unions so that the policymakers can work with them to outline the rights GTAs possess.

Teachers' unions at all levels have faced push back (Stern, 1998). Just recently, the State Senate of the region where T University is located passed an education bill to ban K-12 teachers' collective bargaining rights, which leave teachers' unions to work like professional associations more than anything else (Campbell, 2019). Graduate student unions face even more backlash than teachers' unions. Many universities, especially private ones, have opposed unionization, and they claim that the graduate students they pay to teach courses, grade papers, and do labor to support professors' research are students, and not employees who have rights to unionize (Langin, 2019).

Moreover, the state that T University is located in has no unions for faculty, which makes it difficult for faculty members to secure their own rights such as teaching an R1-typical number of classes, getting credit for working with graduate students, credit for mentoring, etc. One argument I have made consistently throughout this paper is that the problems we are facing are

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not caused by each other but through the neoliberal system. How can professors advocate for and protect GTAs when they cannot even protect themselves?

As we move forward, I believe we must push policymakers and university administrators to allow some forms of graduate students' unions and/or provide ways through which GTAs can have their voices heard. We need to effectively communicate our needs with those in immediate power positions to obtain actions that are needed to support our development as scholars and educators. We also need to team with faculty to promote flourishing education and research in the university.

Future Research

Building upon Foucault's theory of power and governmentality, this study has clearly shown that neoliberal ideology has penetrated every aspect of our lives as GTAs and forced us to conduct ourselves in specific ways, which only serves the interests of Capital. With the notion of "governmentality," Foucault wants to understand the self as a cultural and historical construction created or fabricated, in part, through the disciplines that take as central the freedom of the subject and his or her autonomy (which according to Foucault, is also a byword of self-regulation) (Besley, 2007). In this study, the notion of self-autonomy and regulation is explored mostly within the academic sphere of the higher education institution, in a very constrained manner. And, there are many factors/spaces left undiscussed /unexamined in this dissertation in terms of how different elements of neoliberal higher education institutions, outside of our field of study, may influence and construct our realities as well as our subjectivities. As we move forward, I believe that it is vital for researchers of different fields to collaborate so that they can conduct

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research to investigate and determine how different elements on campus may influence the construction of students' subjectivities in the neoliberal higher education context.

Concluding Remarks

One of the major themes this study confirmed that the five participants from different backgrounds are all vulnerable to the dominant neoliberal ideology, and each of the identities we possess makes us susceptible in different ways. Intersectionality, as a research tool, revealed the power dynamics in terms of how we are positioned differently by the system due to the complex layers of the identities we carry. Moreover, I hope this study also revealed to readers how neoliberal ideology has infiltrated our thoughts and behaviors and influenced us to think about and talk about ourselves in specific ways in order to be seen as responsible.

When I first started this journey, I argued that the problems we have are not caused by each other, but by the social contexts we are placed in. Hence, we must examine different social spaces so that we have a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shaped our experiences. Looking back on this, I feel that I did not really have a full understanding of what it truly entails in order to do so. For instance, when I first started, I was so occupied with the vulnerabilities of the GTAs and had given little thoughts to the lives of professors who work for the same neoliberal institution.

Through this process, I have realized that in order to fully understand the complex relationships among people within the higher education space, as the researcher, one must be able to contemplate his/her preconceptions about certain issues/people involved in these narratives regularly. Then, one must be able to set aside these biases and be brave enough to recognize the vulnerabilities of all parties involved in these relationships within neoliberal

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education contexts. As I move forward, I would like to add and interweave more professors' voices into the stories of GTAs so that I can truly create a space which examines perspectives from both parties, hence to show how the power dynamics within the neoliberal institutions influence the relationships among one another.

Lastly, this entire process has allowed me to reflect upon my own experiences and those of my colleagues, through which I am able to learn, to heal, and to grow both academically and emotionally. As I move forward in my career, I believe the insightful knowledge that I have gained from this study will allow me to help others to navigate similar situations, and together, we will be able to push for structural and social changes.

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Appendix A: Initial Interview Protocol

1. Can you describe a little bit about who you are (age, race, gender, etc.)? What courses have you taught in teacher education? At which institutions? For how many years?
2. What made you decide to continue/return to graduate school? How close are you to graduation? What is your plan afterwards?
3. Can you tell me about your interactions with your students as a GTA? How do university policies and practices influence these interactions? Can you think of another example? (Repeat for colleagues/peers and professors)
4. Can you tell me about your interactions with your colleagues as a GTA? How do university policies and practices influence these interactions? Can you think of another example?
5. How about your interactions with your professors? How do university policies and practices influence these interactions? Can you think of another example?
6. What experience as a GTA has had the greatest, most long-lasting impact on you? Why did you choose this one?
7. How do the experiences that you have mentioned in this interview affect your understanding of higher education? How might they shape your trajectory towards graduation and beyond? How do they affect how you view teaching and learning? How you do teach and how you would like to teach?
8. What suggestions do you have for other GTAs to better navigate their experiences as GTAs?

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Appendix B: Research Journal

Why doing PhD:

- a determination, like the environment, homeschooled
- Contrasted experience in a small liberal College, people are happy vs. independence in ■
- Even though two institutions are in similar SES, with a tough due to RI status
- Feeling beaten down, poor at school & trying to prove to people they are wrong
- Owns the label & disprove the label

How to improve:

- ① Supportive network, from Professor, from each other (connection through church, class members)
- ② A safe environment to speak, articulate frustration, people don't expect perfection, calm
- ③ Overcome Perfectionism, nervousness

- ④ Specific strategies, send comment to Zen, supportive Professors
- ⑤ Extern. start as a grad. assist. teaching

■ TAs Felt, should be explicitly explained, authored Agency piece in the broader
 ■ Acknowledge the culture difference
 "A lot of negation based on my story."
 Try not be quite so close to that.
 Making sure people have decent pay. ~~and~~
 "Protection." Benefits, don't be too biased.

Why feeling stressed: Unorganized, disconnected

- Time expectation about teaching at work when compare to his old university.
- Different teaching style in ■
- Workload is a lot of more in CEHS compare to math department
- No regulations about what to do as a GTA
- Feeling disconnected vs forced interaction in the math department

■ Individualism in ZEP

■ scrutinize & evaluation

Feeling lost the first semester with little direction

■ Adjust teaching style from middle school to college

Fear of being scrutinized, don't put a lot of comments on her work

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Appendix C: Example of Labovian Approach to Narrative Analysis

	Story 2 (Day 2 P11)	Story 3 (Day 2 L 328 - 341)	Memo
Abstract	a. And when I was teaching, I heard some joking, do you know, about my accent in my class.	a. I remember when I pronounce a word, like wrong, or not clear enough. b. I hear someone correct me.	<p>Contradictions in actions:</p> <p>1. She heard people VS. she pretends she didn't.</p> <p>2. Confronting people VS. pretend nothing happened because she didn't want to be picked.</p> <p>3. I don't care attitude VS. I wrote something on the whiteboard to make people aware that I am smart because I am bilingual.</p> <p>Reflections:</p> <p>Is this forced positioning of the self and the others? Being helpless and</p>
Orientation	b. I was teaching freshmen engineers (in the library).	c. I was teaching freshmen engineers (in the library).	
Complicating Action	c. I know I have accent. I heard something about my accent, or they just, some words that I might pronounced them like wrong or something like that.	<p>d. I just pretend I never heard these things.</p> <p>e. Half of the students, they come to the university as a first generation, because they have never seen a foreign teacher or because they raised in like rural area or a small town.</p> <p>f. Because if you just go and show something that you are, you get picked, I don't want to get picked.</p> <p>g. So I never say anything that I hear you.</p> <p>h. But in other day, I</p>	

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		just started my class, read this scenario, like I wrote, I wrote a word on the whiteboard that if some people have an accent, it means that person knows one more language other than you.	passive to being positioned as agents who can make a change indirectly - From “I don’t care, I pretend I didn’t hear them” to “I wrote something on the white board so that I send out an indirect message to my students so that they can stop making fun of my accent”.
Evaluation	d. I was really upset after that class.	i. The thing is, I just like, indirect things that I hear you guys, but I don’t care.	
Result	<p>e. I had a class with Dr. XX the day after that.</p> <p>f. He talked to me about my experience.</p> <p>g. He told me just to ignore this kind of stuff.</p> <p>h. They’ve never seen any peoples from other countries. You know, it’s their first experience, experience of facing new peoples from other countries.</p>	j. I was finished, no one talk about that.	
Coda	<p>i. He helped me a lot.</p> <p>j. But overall, I don’t care.</p>	k. But I don’t care.	